

The Three Investigators - 18

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The Mystery Of The Shrinking House-us



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Alfred Hitchcock and

The Three Investigators in

The Mystery of the Shrinking House

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**Alfred Hitchcock Misses a
Clue**

A Few Words from Alfred

Hitchcock

When I first met the trio of lads who call themselves The Three Investigators, I

foolishly promised to introduce their most interesting cases. Little did I realize how prolific the lads would be! As you will see, I did my best to avoid introducing this case but the boys foiled me. So I will do my duty, and proceed with yet another introduction to The Three Investigators.

The members of this intrepid junior detective firm are Jupiter Jones, Pete

Crenshaw, and Bob Andrews. All three reside in the town of Rocky Beach, California, a few miles from Hollywood. Jupiter is the brains of the firm. Pete provides the brawn. And Bob, the most studious of the three, is in charge of research.

Together the three lads are a formidable team. They have outwitted the cleverest of crooks and survived the most terrifying situations. In their newest case they are asked to track down the missing possessions of a dead artist. A

simple enough assignment but one that

leads them into strange byways of mystery and intrigue.

Now you know enough to begin reading the story ... if you dare.

Alfred Hitchcock

A Few Words from Alfred Hitchcock

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A Figure in Black

Uncle Titus! Jupiter Jones cried. Look over there!

The truck from The Jones Salvage Yard had just stopped in the driveway of the old house in Remuda Canyon on the outskirts of Rocky Beach. Jupiter and his friend Pete Crenshaw were sitting in the truck cab with Uncle Titus Jones.

What? Uncle Titus said, startled. Look where, Jupiter?

There! On the side of the house!

Jupiter pointed into the twilight. A black shape seemed to hang halfway up the side of the big old frame house in the canyon.

I dont see a thing, Jupiter Jones, Uncle Titus said.

Gosh, Pete said, neither do I, Jupe.

Jupiter stared. The figure in black was gone. One minute it had been on the side of the house, then it had disappeared into thin air! Or had it been there at all?

Im sure I saw someone! Jupiter said. Someone all in black on the side of the house!

Uncle Titus looked dubiously at the big frame house. The canyon walls cast strange, eerie shadows on the isolated house and the small cottage near it. All seemed quiet and peaceful.

You probably saw a shadow, Jupe, said Uncle Titus.

Canyon shadows sure play funny tricks, Pete agreed.

No, Jupiter insisted, I saw someone all in black, and I think he went into the house through a window!

Uncle Titus hesitated. He knew that his stocky nephew had a great deal of imagination, and he hated to raise a false

alarm. But he also knew that Jupiter was usually right.

All right, come on then, Uncle Titus said. Wed better tell Professor Carswell what you saw.

The two boys followed Uncle Titus up an overgrown walk to the front door of the big house. It was an old house from the last century, with wooden towers, many peaks and gables, columns holding up the porch, and a massive front door.

The man who answered their knocking was tall and thin, with very deep shadowed eyes. He wore a rumpled tweed jacket even in July, and carried a thick book in some foreign language.

Professor Carswell? Uncle Titus asked.

The Professor smiled. You must be Mr Jones from the salvage yard. Come in. What I have to sell

Uncle Titus interrupted, I dont mean to alarm you, Professor, but my nephew here insists that he saw a figure all in black climbing up the side of your house a moment ago.

A Figure in Black

Someone climbing up this house? The Professor blinked at the boys and

Uncle Titus. You must be mistaken.

No, sir, Jupiter said urgently, Im certain of what I saw. Do you have anything valuable a burglar would want?

Im afraid not, young man. Absolutely nothing, Professor Carswell said.

Still, if you say you saw something, Im sure you did. Only I cant imagine ...

ah! Of course! You must have seen my son up to one of his games. He has a black cowboy outfit, and try as I may I cant seem to convince Hal that doors are better entrances than windows.

Professor Carswell smiled again, and

Uncle Titus nodded.

Of course, thats it. I know how boys are, yessir, the owner of the salvage yard said.

How old is your son, sir? Jupiter asked.

A little younger than you, I guess, but taller. As tall as your friend there.

The Professor nodded to Pete.

The person I saw was much bigger, Jupiter said firmly.

Ah? Professor Carswell looked sceptically at Jupiter. Very well, young man. Well see if your burglar is in the

house.

The Professor led them through the downstairs rooms of the big old house.

Many of the rooms were empty and closed off.

A professor of languages cant really afford a house like this these days,

the Professor said sadly. My ancestors were wealthy ship captains who brought goods here from the East. They built this house. Now only myself and my son remain. A cousin left the place to us a year ago. We closed off most of the rooms in this house, and rented out the old caretakers cottage to make ends

meet.

They found nothing in the downstairs rooms, and went upstairs. Most of the rooms upstairs were also empty, and they saw no sign of an intruder. Jupiter studied all the rooms.

Theres not much to steal, he admitted.

You sound disappointed, said the Professor.

Jupe likes mysteries, Pete said. Only there sure isnt any burglar around here.

Professor Carswells son isnt in the house, either, Jupiter pointed out thoughtfully. I know I saw someone. You

called Uncle Titus to sell some items to the salvage yard. Is there something valuable among them?

I wish there were, Professor Carswell said. But theyre only what poor old Mr Cameron had when he died a month ago in our cottage. The contents of two suitcases, and some of his amateur paintings. Old Cameron was something of a recluse. He owned little, and couldnt even pay his rent the last few months.

I hope to recover a few dollars by selling his meagre possessions to your uncle.

Recluses sometimes have hidden

valuables, Jupiter said.

Professor Carswell smiled. You sound like a detective.

A Figure in Black

We are detectives! Pete blurted out.
Show him, Jupe!

Jupiter produced a business card, on which was printed:

Well, well, very impressive, Professor Carswell said. Im quite sorry there is nothing here to investigate, boys. It must have been the canyon shadows you saw.

The Professor had hardly stopped speaking when they heard a cry:

Help! Help!

They all froze. Professor Carswell listened, and suddenly turned pale.

Help! The cry came from outside. Dad!

That's my son, Hal! Professor Carswell exclaimed. Come on!

The Professor ran down the stairs and out the door with the boys and Uncle

Titus right behind him. In the canyon twilight the cry came again from the small cottage off to their left.

Help!

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A Figure in Black

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Jupiter is Right and
Wrong!

Professor Carswell raced across the lawn of the big house towards the small cottage, with Uncle Titus and Pete close behind him, and the overweight Jupiter puffing in the rear. Breathlessly they ran under the patched porch awning of the cottage and burst into a small living-room. The room was sparsely furnished and empty!

Harold! Professor Carswell called out

in alarm.

Dad! a voice cried. Help!

The voice came from the tiny bedroom of the cottage. Pete and Uncle Titus followed the Professor into it. They saw a narrow bed, a chair, and a large bureau that had been knocked over. A thin boy lay on the floor half under the bureau. Professor Carswell hurried to him.

Im okay, Dad, the boy said. I just cant get out.

Together Professor Carswell, Pete and Uncle Titus heaved the heavy bureau off Hal Carswell. The boy stood up and

brushed himself off.

I heard a noise in here, Dad, Hal explained, so I came in to look. There was someone all in black and masked. When I yelled, he pushed the bureau over on me and ran out the back way!

Jupe was right! Pete exclaimed. He did see a man in black but the man must have been coming out of your house, not going in! Jupe ...

Pete looked all around the bedroom, and in the small living-room. Jupiter was nowhere in the cottage.

Jupiter Jones! Uncle Titus called out.

Gosh, Pete gulped. He was right behind us when we ran out of the house.

Where could he be?

Professor Carswell turned to his son. You say that would be burglar ran out the back? Did he have a weapon, Hal?

I didnt see any

Once again they all froze as a cry broke the twilight outside the cottage.

Agggghhhhhhhhhhhh!

Professor Carswell whirled. That sounds as if it came from the gorge at the back! Maybe someone fell in!

Is it a deep gorge? Uncle Titus asked nervously.

No, but deep enough to injure someone, Professor Carswell said. Follow me.

The tall Professor quickly led them behind the cottage, where they crashed through the thick brushwood and the trees in the lengthening shadows of the

Jupiter is Right and Wrong!

outlying canyon. They stopped abruptly at the edge of a narrow, steep-sided gully about ten feet deep. It ran across the canyon, curving away out of sight in both directions. Its bottom was strewn with heavy rocks and eroded trees.

There was no sign of Jupiter or anyone else.

Look! Pete said.

A dark stain was on some rocks below and to the right. The four of them scrambled down the steep sides to stand over the darkened rocks. Pete touched the stain. It was wet.

Blood, the Second Investigator said, and

gulped.

When Pete and the others had rushed into the cottage earlier, Jupiter had been far behind. He saw the black-garbed figure running from behind the cottage towards the brushwood at the rear of the property.

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Jupiter is Right and Wrong!

The stocky First Investigator realized that no one else had seen the fleeing intruder. The man was sure to escape if Jupiter took the time to warn the others in the cottage. He hesitated for only a second, then turned and pursued the running figure.

Jupiter was unable to get a good look at the man before he vanished into the thick brush and trees. Panting, the stout First Investigator reached the dense underbrush just as he heard the cry

ahead. There was a crashing, the sound of something sliding and falling, and then a loud thud and groaning cry.

Jupiter slipped through the dense brushwood to the edge of a narrow gorge.

In the shadowed gloom at the bottom of the steep little gully, the black figure staggered up and limped off along the gorge to the right. The man was dragging his left leg.

Jupiter slid down, and at the bottom of the gorge he found blood on some rocks. A trail of blood led off to the right. Jupiter followed the trail cautiously.

The gulley was the perfect place for an ambush if the intruder knew he was being followed.

A car door slammed up ahead, and a car engine started. Jupiter began to run. A little way ahead the gorge came out into the main canyon road, which looped back along the side of the Carswell property before turning in the direction of Rocky Beach. By the time Jupiter reached the road, the rear lights of the car were vanishing towards the town.

Pete was still staring at the blood on the rocks at the bottom of the gorge when he heard someone coming. Uncle Titus heard it, too.

Down, Peter! he said. Everyone ... !

They all crouched in the shadows of the gorge, ready to leap on the intruder.

Jupiter came around the curve in the gully.

Jupe! Pete cried. What happened?

I chased the intruder, Jupiter said, but I lost him.

Jupiter Jones! Uncle Titus exploded. You should know better than to try to capture a thief by yourself!

I didnt try to capture him, Uncle Titus. I just followed to try to see his face, but it

was dark, and he had a car.

Professor Carswell shook his head. I cant understand what he wanted here. All I can imagine is that he made a mistake. There are wealthy people in these big canyon houses, and he must have simply picked the wrong house.

Well, whatever, perhaps we should get to business, Mr Jones?

They all went back to the cottage. Professor Carswell switched on the lights and took two old leather suitcases from the bedroom cupboard. In one were clothes an old-fashioned dress suit, a grey flannel suit, and several shirts, ties and pairs of socks. In the other were

some paints, a stuffed owl, a small statue of Venus, a pair of large binoculars, and a box of silver forks, knives and spoons.

Old Joshua acted rough, and never wore anything but a sweat shirt and a pair of old trousers, Professor Carswell said. But I could see he was well educated, and he always used his silver when he ate. Yet in the seven months he was here, all he did was sit out on the lawn in our canvas chair and sketch.

At night he painted all the time. See?

The Professor took a canvas covering off a pile in the corner, revealing twenty paintings. They were all pictures of the cottage and grounds. In some, the cottage

was seen from very close-up, while in others it was so far away that all you could see was the striped porch awning with its patches.

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Jupiter is Right and Wrong!

Theyre not bad, Uncle Titus said. His eyes gleamed as he looked around at the suitcases, the silver cutlery, and the paintings. There was nothing Uncle

Titus enjoyed more than buying things to sell in his junkyard. His wife, Jupiters

Aunt Mathilda, frequently complained about the outlandish items he found. But

Uncle Titus was always convinced that a buyer would turn up. Usually he was right.

You're selling all of this? asked Titus Jones.

Yes. The old man died owing me rent, Professor Carswell said. He sometimes got money from Europe, so I wrote to that address, but I've had no answer. No one has come, and I need the money.

While Uncle Titus and the Professor discussed the price, Jupiter looked at the meagre possessions of Joshua Cameron with disappointment. There was nothing at all that looked really valuable.

What happened to Mr Cameron, Hal? he asked.

He just got sick, Hal Carswell said. I

tried to help him, but he was delirious with fever. Babbled about canvases and zigzags. The doctor came and wanted to move him to a hospital, but Mr Cameron died first. He was just old and sick.

Well, Pete said, there sure isnt much in his stuff that a thief would want, Jupe. A mistake, I guess.

Jupiter nodded glumly. They loaded Joshua Camerons things on to the salvage yard truck and started home along the winding canyon road. As the truck passed the mouth of the gorge, Jupiter frowned.

Thieves dont usually pick a house by mistake, the stocky First Investigator

said thoughtfully.

I guess well never know for sure what that man wanted, Pete said.

I suppose not, Jupiter said, and sighed.

But both boys were wrong.

A Client Arrives

One afternoon a week later, Jupiter and the third member of The Three Investigators, Bob Andrews, were working in the salvage yard. It was Bob who first saw the long, yellow Mercedes drive into the yard and stop in front of the office.

A small, elegant man got out of the dazzling car. His grey hair seemed to shine in the late afternoon sun like silver. He wore a white summer suit with a blue silk shirt. He carried a slim

black cane, and something glittered in his hand. For a moment he stopped and looked towards the boys. Then he stalked abruptly into the junkyard office.

Both boys gaped after the elegant little man. Then Jupiter suddenly gulped.

I forgot!

Were supposed to be watching the office for Uncle Titus. Come on.

The boys hurried towards the office. Just as they reached the yellow Mercedes, the rear door opened and a tall lady with blue-grey hair stepped out. She wore a white silk dress and a simple diamond brooch. She stared down at the boys

with regal eyes.

I wish to speak with a Mr Titus Jones. Is he here?

My uncle left me in charge of the yard, maam, Jupiter told the queenly woman.

Indeed? Can one so young assume charge?

I think so, maam, Jupiter said firmly.

Good. The lady smiled. I like confidence, young man.

Besides, Bob added, grinning at her, we dont get many customers after five oclock, anyway.

The lady laughed. I like honesty, too.
And you do have a customer now.

My estate manager, Mr Marechal, is
already in your office. I suggest we join
him.

As the boys followed the elegant lady
into the office, the small, silver-haired
man stepped quickly away from Uncle
Tituss desk. Jupiter noticed that the
record book of purchases made for the
junkyard was on the desk, and seemed to
have been moved.

Armand, the imperious lady said, it
seems that these boys are in charge here.

So? The man bowed to the boys. They

saw what had glittered in his hand outside his cane had a large silver head. Then I shall state our business.

The Countess wishes to retrieve the possessions of the late Mr Joshua Cameron sold to you by Professor Carswell. We will, of course, pay a suitable price to reimburse you for your trouble.

Is there something valuable among them, sir? Jupiter asked eagerly.

They have only sentimental value, I fear, the tall lady said.

A Client Arrives

The Countess is Joshua Camerons sister, the man added.

Bob exclaimed, Are you really a countess?

My late husband was a count, yes, said the Countess with a smile, but my maiden name is Cameron. I am poor Joshuas younger sister. Joshua was eccentric, and a recluse, and since I am twenty years younger, we were not very close. Still, it grieves me that he died alone in a strange place.

You see, boys, Mr Marechal said, we were in Africa until a few days ago, and

only just received Professor Carswells letter telling of Joshuas tragic death.

We caught the first jet to America, but, alas, Professor Carswell had already sold Joshuas things to you for back rent. A paltry sum we will gladly double to have the possessions returned to us.

Well get them, Bob declared. You just wait, Countess.

The boys took the purchase book and went out into the junkyard. Jupiter

A Client Arrives looked for the suitcases, the clothes, and the silver. Bob tried to locate the stuffed owl, the statue of Venus, and the binoculars. They both asked Hans and Konrad, the Bavarian brothers who worked in the yard, about the twenty paintings. Fifteen minutes later, the boys returned to the office dejected.

Im sorry, Jupiter said sadly. We seem to have sold everything except the clothes.

The clothes you may keep, Mr Marechal said. But you found nothing else? Not

even his paintings?

That is peculiar, Jupiter acknowledged. We dont sell many paintings, but theyre all gone.

Where? Mr Marechal asked.

Jupiter shook his head. We keep a record of what we buy, Mr Marechal, and from whom, but we dont keep a record of our customers. So many people come here and buy just one thing, and we all sell. Konrad one of our helpers, thinks he sold all the paintings to one man, but he cant remember who. I dont think any of us will remember the customers.

This is very unfortunate, boys, the Countess said.

Cant you locate the things somehow? Mr Marechal said.

Jupiters eyes brightened. Well, sir, perhaps we could look for them, if ...

Jupiter hesitated. The Countess frowned.

If what, young man, she said. Come, speak up.

Jupiter drew himself up to seem as imposing as he could. If you wish to hire us. It happens that Bob and I, with our friend, Pete, are investigators.

Here are our cards.

The stout leader of The Three Investigators presented their business card, and their green card that stated:

This certifies that the bearer is a Volunteer Junior Assistant Deputy co-operating with the police force of Rocky Beach. Any assistance given him will be appreciated.

(Signed) Samuel Reynolds

Chief of Police

The Countess smiled. Quite impressive, boys, but

My pardon, Countess, Mr Marechal interrupted, and nodded to the boys.

We are strangers here. The boys know the area, are experienced, and know what to look for. Besides, people might be more willing to return Joshuas things to boys. They appear quite intelligent. Why not let them try?

The Countess considered. Very well, Armand, perhaps you are right. I

would like to have our family heirlooms and poor Joshuas last paintings.

We'll find the things, ma'am, both boys said at once.

Good, Mr Marechal said. We can be reached at the Cliff House Motel up the coast. We will be there a week. After that, the Countess must return to

Europe. Good luck, boys.

The Countess and Mr Marechal went to their Mercedes and drove off. As soon as the yellow car had gone, Bob exclaimed:

Jupe, how do we

A Client Arrives

The Records and Research man of the trio stopped in mid-sentence. Jupiter was staring at a small blue coup' e that drove past the driveway opening in the salvage yard fence and vanished down the street after the yellow Mercedes.

Thats curious, said Jupiter.

What is? asked Bob.

That blue car started up just after the Mercedes left. It must have been parked out on the street.

So?

Few people park there unless they are coming here and we havent had any customers in the last half hour except the Countess and Mr Marechal.

You think that blue car is following

Before Bob could finish, a boy on a bicycle rode into the junkyard. It was the slim, dark-haired son of Professor Carswell.

Guys! Hal Carswell cried as he saw them. Has the Countess been here?

She just left, Hal, Bob said.

Did you give her back Mr Camerons possessions?

Weve sold most of them, said Jupe. But I think we can get them back.

Whew! said Hal. Thats a relief! The Countess and Mr Marechal came to our house early this afternoon. When Dad told them wed sold Mr Camerons things to you, the Countess got real angry and said we should have waited for an answer to our letter. Mr Marechal calmed her down and said we couldnt have known old Joshua had a sister. But I know Dads worried. Maybe we shouldnt have sold the things. The Countess could make trouble if she doesnt get them back!

Tell me, Hal, said Jupe. When the Countess and Mr Marechal were at your house, did you happen to notice a blue coup' e anywhere near?

A blue coup' e ... ? Hal thought for a minute. Yes! There was one! A

blue car went out the canyon road right after the Countess left. I remember noticing it because it was unfamiliar. We dont get much traffic on the road

its a dead end and usually only the neighbours drive by. But whats this all about?

We just saw a blue car follow the

Countess away from here, too! said Bob.

You mean someone is spying on her?

Apparently so, said Jupiter. He looked thoughtful. First an intruder breaks into your cottage, Hal. Now someone is watching the Countess and

Mr Marechal. In both cases, old Joshua Camerons possessions are involved.

Theres something mysterious about it all, fellows.

Do you think old Joshua did have something valuable? Bob asked.

I dont know yet, Records. First we have

to worry about getting back old

Joshuas things from whoever bought them.

Whoever bought them? repeated Hal.
Dont you know who bought them?

We have no idea, Jupiter said blandly.

Then, Hal said, startled, how can you ever find them?

Bob said, I think I know.

Yes, Jupiter said. Well use a Ghost-to-Ghost Hookup!

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Jupiters Mistake

Ghost-to-Ghost, Hal said. But there arent any ghosts!

Some scientists are no longer sure of that, Jupiter said. But, actually, ghosts have nothing to do with our hookup system.

Adults just think its ghosts at work, Bob added, laughing.

Moments later, Uncle Titus drove into the junkyard, and Jupe and Bob were off duty until after dinner. With Hal, they

slipped off to the secret headquarters of The Three Investigators an old, damaged house trailer now hidden by piles of junk at one side of the salvage yard. The main entrance to it was Tunnel

Two, a large corrugated pipe that led under the surrounding junk to a trap door in the trailers floor. Crawling through the pipe, the boys surfaced into a little room crowded with equipment a desk, chairs, filing cabinets, a private phone, and various devices that Jupiter had invented for the Investigators work.

Opening off the office room were a small lab and a darkroom.

Hal admired the set up, but quickly

returned to the problem at hand. How, he demanded again, can you find Mr Camerons things if you dont even know who bought them?

How many friends do you have, Hal? Jupiter asked.

What? Gosh, maybe five good ones. Why?

Jupiter explained that Hal would call his friends and give each a list of the items that were wanted. Each friend would call five other friends, who in turn would call five more, and so on. Jupiter, Bob, and Pete would do the same.

In a few hours, every kid in Rocky Beach will be looking for the things.

Maybe kids as far as Los Angeles or Oxnard.

Wow! Hal said. He mentally added up the thousands of people who could be reached. You could contact the whole world!

Well, Jupiter said, we havent tried the world, but if we could solve the language problem, it would probably work.

How soon will it get results? Hal asked. I have to go home for dinner, and Dad is taking me to Los Angeles tonight.

Not before morning, Jupiter decided. The kids we call can start looking after dinner when most people are at home. Our message will list the items we want, what we'll pay, and where to bring them. We'll also specify that the kids should call us first and describe what they've found. That way we can screen out the things that obviously weren't Mr Camerons, and we won't be flooded by kids coming here.

We'll have to offer a reward, reminded Bob.

Hmmm, mused Jupe. Let's say that anyone who brings in a correct item will have his choice of anything in the junkyard priced at one dollar or less.

And, of course, well pay back the purchase price of old Joshuas things.

Jupiters Mistake

They composed the message listing the items, and Jupiter called Pete to tell him what they were doing. Then the three boys went home for dinner. By eight oclock that evening, every boy and girl in Rocky Beach was out looking for Joshua Camerons belongings.

By nine the next morning, The Three Investigators were gathered in Headquarters waiting for results of the

Ghost-to-Ghost Hookup. They watched the telephone expectantly.

There will be a lot of wrong items, Jupiter pointed out, but by having the kids telephone, well not waste their time.

Jupiter prided himself on his planning and foresight, but by ten oclock something seemed wrong. The telephone in Headquarters had not rung once!

Jupiters confidence had begun to fade, and Pete looked uncomfortable.

Jupiter bit his lip. Someone should have called by now.

There was a sudden knocking at the trap door up from Tunnel Two. The boys looked at each other uneasily. Bob finally went and opened the trap door.

Hal Carswell climbed up into the room.

Gosh, guys, why are you in here? the Professors son said. Kids are all over the junkyard outside looking for you!

Outside? Jupiter quavered. But we told them ...

Er, Jupe, Pete said slowly. Ive been trying to remember. We told the kids to call here, but I dont remember giving them our phone number.

Gosh, Bob echoed, neither do I, Jupe!

Phone number? Hal said.

Jupiter reddened as he looked at the message he had written down the night before to pass along the Ghost-to-Ghost Hookup.

I ... I guess I forgot to put it in, Jupiter said. I guess we better go out.

Is Uncle Titus out there? Pete asked Hal Carswell.

I only saw those two big helpers of yours, Hal said. They had kids all around them.

I dont think I want to go out, Pete said.

Jupiter took a deep breath. Im afraid we have to.

They emerged into a scene of wild chaos.

Oh no! Pete groaned.

Gosh, Hal said, theyre still coming in!

Jupiter only stared.

Boys and girls milled everywhere through the junkyard. They were shouting and running, and some climbed high on the mounds of junk. There were hundreds of them, like ants. They

swarmed around Hans and Konrad, holding up the objects they had found for the Ghost-to-Ghost. More rode in on bicycles and on scooters. Some came on foot. There were even teenagers on motorcycles and in wildly painted cars.

I do not know what you want! Hans was shouting.

We did not ask for you to come! Konrad was protesting.

Suddenly, some of the kids saw Jupiter and the boys.

There! That must be them! one boy shouted.

In a second, the whole horde of kids poured towards The Three Investigators and Hal. Jupiter turned pale. He had once been a child film star named Baby

Jupiters Mistake

Fatso, and ever since fans had mobbed him in his acting days, Jupe had hated crowds.

Bob cried, What do we do, Jupe?

I ... I ... Jupiter stammered.

We run for it! Pete yelled.

Suddenly, Hal Carswell stood up on a petrol drum. Above the onrushing stampede of kids, Hal shouted a stream of some strange language and waved his

arms commandingly. Confused and stunned, the mob of kids hesitated and stared at him.

Quick, Jupe, Pete urged, what can we give them all for a small reward.

Hurry!

Give ... I ... Jupiter stuttered. Well ... theres a barrel of old political campaign badges. Maybe they ...

Swell, Pete said. Hold your hats!

Pete strode out to the wild mob of kids, each with some item to sell to the boys.

All right! Pete shouted. A valuable old

political badge for everyone!

No one else will have the same ones! If you want one, form in five lines facing us! First line on the left for suitcases! Next line for stuffed owls and statues.

Third line for binoculars. Fourth line for silver knives and forks. Last line for paintings! No pushing, everyone gets a turn. One of us will stand at the head of each line and inspect what youve brought. Okay, now form the lines!

The kids, even the teenagers, hurried to form the lines. They realized it was the quickest way to end the chaos.

Good work, Second, Jupiter said

approvingly to Pete.

Thank Hal, he stopped them, Pete said. One of us will have to examine two lines, and Hans better give out the badges.

At each line, one of the boys quickly inspected each item as the kids filed past. Each person with a wrong item was sent to Hans for his political button for trying. After an hour the junkyard was almost empty again and the boys had the stuffed owl, both suitcases, the binoculars, and the silverware.

A girl gave me the address of where the statue of Venus is, Bob said, but the lady who has it wouldnt sell it back. I gave

the girl her full reward anyway.

Good, Jupiter said. You go and see if you can get the statue, Records.

And Pete, you call Mr Marechal and the Countess at The Cliff House Motel and tell them what we have.

The two Investigators hurried off.

Gosh, it worked great, Jupiter, Hal Carswell said as he looked at what they had recovered. Except, we didnt get any of the paintings!

Im afraid someone from out of town may have Jupiter began, and stopped. He stared at a shiny car that had just come

into the junkyard.

A tall, skinny youth not much older than the trio of investigators got out of the car. He was scowling nastily at Jupiter, and he was carrying a painting!

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Jupiters Mistake

Trouble from an Old Enemy

Would this be one of the paintings you want, Jones? the skinny boy said.

Skinny Norris! Jupiter exclaimed. What are you doing here?

E. Skinner Norris glared at Jupiter. The nasty youth hated the trio of investigators, and out of jealousy had been trying to wreck anything they did ever since he first met them. Although not much older than they were, Skinny had a drivers licence. It made him feel superior to The Three Investigators.

Never you mind, Skinny said. Just tell me if this is one of the paintings youre after.

Jupiter and Hal both recognized the painting as one of old Joshua Camerons last works. Hal was about to say something when Jupiter spoke quickly:

Well, Im not exactly sure, Skinny. Where did you get it?

Thats my business, Skinny snarled.

We have to know you can sell it, Hal pointed out.

Skinny paled. What do you mean by that?

I know you didnt buy it from us, Jupiter said.

Maybe you stole it! Hal declared.

I did not! Skinny said hotly, and then his eyes narrowed. So, it is one of the right paintings! I thought it was.

Yes, Jupiter admitted. Well buy it, Skinny.

No, I dont think Ill sell it now, Skinny said, and went quickly back to his car.

Before the boys could stop him, Skinny had driven out of the junkyard.

Pete ran up from the office. What was

Skinny doing here?

He had one of Joshuas paintings! Hal said.

But he suddenly wouldnt sell it, Jupiter added.

Gosh, Pete said, and Mr Marechal is coming over now.

While the boys waited for Mr Marechal, Bob returned from trying to buy the statue of Venus.

The lady still wont sell the statue, Bob reported.

That, and the loss of the painting, curbed

their elation over the success of the Ghost-to-Ghost Hookup. But when Mr Marechal arrived to claim the five items they had found, he was beaming.

You are fine detectives, boys! I congratulate you.

But we didnt get the statue, Bob said. A Mrs Leary, at 22 Rojas Street, has it, and she wont sell it back.

Jupiter explained what had happened with Skinny and the one painting they had found.

Trouble from an Old Enemy

Well, I have the address. I shall speak with Mrs Leary myself, Mr Marechal said. As for this Norris boy, he lives here in Rocky Beach? A well-known family, you say?

Yes, sir, Pete said. Theyve got a big house on the beach.

Then I am sure you boys will find a way to secure that painting, eh? Even one of Joshuas last works would please the Countess, Mr Marechal said. Now

I shall pay you a three-dollar reward for each item, plus the purchase prices.

That makes fifteen dollars for your services. Is that satisfactory?

Yes, sir! all three Investigators said at once.

Good. Mr Marechal smiled. And I shall await your equal success on the paintings, boys.

Jupiter wrote out a receipt for Mr Marechal while the other boys put the retrieved possessions in the back of the Mercedes. With a small bow, Mr Marechal returned to his car swinging his silver-headed cane, and Hal went home to report the mornings success to his dad.

After lunch, The Three Investigators met again in Headquarters. Jupiter sat at the desk looking thoughtful.

Fellows, the First Investigator said, I do not think Skinny ever intended to sell us that painting, at least not yet. I think he simply wanted us to identify it for him.

Why, Jupe? Bob asked.

Im not sure, Records. Possibly because he does know where the others are, and he wanted to be sure they were all genuine before he brought them to sell to us. Or possibly he is working for someone else who isnt sure just what old Joshuas paintings looked like. Perhaps whoever is in that blue coup' e.

Who could it be in that blue car? Pete wondered.

I dont know, Second, Jupiter admitted. But we must try to find those twenty paintings for Mr Marechal, and the way to do it is through Skinny.

Maybe he just wants more money, Bob suggested.

Thats Skinny, Pete agreed. Lets try calling him.

Jupiter did as Pete suggested, and switched on the loudspeaker attachment he had built for the telephone. Moments later, Skinny Norriss voice filled the room. Stop pestering me, Fatso. Ive got to go to my new job.

Skinny, well pay twice what we sold the

painting for, Jupiter said into his desk unit.

What painting? Skinny asked, and snickered.

Why, Pete exploded, you know what painting, Skinny!

You dumb-bells must be dreaming, Skinny said.

There was a click, and the buzz of the dialling tone. Skinny had hung up.

The Three Investigators stared at each other.

We can watch him, First, Pete said.

Shadow him.

Jupiter sighed. He has a car, Second. We only have bikes. Uncle Titus would let Hans or Konrad drive us in the small van if we knew where to go, but we dont. We dont have any idea where Skinny got that painting.

We can use our homing device on his car! Bob said. He said he had a job maybe he got the painting there. His parents wouldnt let him work too far away. We could spread out on our bikes around his house, and maybe one of us could stay close enough to follow the homing signal to where he goes!

Trouble from an Old Enemy

Well, Jupiter considered, I guess its certainly worth a try. Well try to talk to him once more at his house, and if that doesnt work, well use the ...

The distant sound of a voice made Jupiter stop speaking. Someone was calling his name. Pete went to the See-All. This was a crude but efficient periscope Jupiter had built to allow the boys to see out into the junkyard. Pete peered into the eye-piece.

Its your Aunt Mathilda, Pete stated. And

shes got a man with her. She looks pretty mad!

What man, Second? Jupiter asked.

I have never seen him before. Kind of short and heavy, in a dark suit and hat, and Jupe! Hes carrying a big, flat case!

Jupiter looked into the See-All. Its the kind of case you carry paintings in!

Come on, fellows.

They hurried out through Tunnel Two.

Trouble from an Old Enemy

The Limping Man

Well, there you are! Aunt Mathilda said as the boys appeared from behind piles of junk. Where do you rascals get to out in that junk? No one can ever find you when we want you!

Im sorry, Aunt Mathilda, Jupiter said.

Dont sweet-talk me, Jupiter Jones, his aunt said briskly. This is Mr De

Groot. Says hes an art dealer from Holland. He wants to ask you about those twenty paintings your Uncle and

you bought out in Remuda Canyon last week.

Though what anyone wants with twenty paintings of the same house, I dont know.

It is not the subject that matters, madame, the short, heavy stranger said in a rough voice. It is the skill.

All I know is what I like, Aunt Mathilda said, and I didnt like those paintings. Every one was different, but not one looked like a real house to me.

Aunt Mathilda stalked off to the office, leaving the boys with Mr De Groot.

The art dealer had fierce, dark eyes.

I come from Amsterdam to meet Joshua Cameron, De Groot said bluntly.

I find he is dead. Then I hear from boys at my motel that a Three Investigators wish to locate twenty of his paintings! I learn that The Three Investigators are at The Jones Salvage Yard. Now I am here to buy those twenty paintings. You have them?

Pete shook his head. None of them were brought back, sir.

None? De Groot angrily paced a few steps in the yard, and glared at the boys. I will pay well for them.

Skinny Norris brought one painting, Mr

De Groot, Bob said, but ...

Jupiter stared at the short, heavy Dutchman, and beyond him towards the entrance to the junkyard. As Bob started to explain about Skinny, Jupiter broke in:

But it was the wrong painting, Mr De Groot.

It was not a Joshua Cameron?

Im afraid it wasnt, sir, Jupiter said sadly.

Bob and Pete blinked at Jupiter, but they did not say anything. They had learned not to question what their stout leader

did, no matter how sudden or strange.
De Groot stared at them, and scowled at Jupiter.

I hope you are not lying to me, he said.

I do not lie, sir, Jupiter said loftily.

No, perhaps not, De Groot said, but his voice was suspicious. This Norris you speak of, he is a tall, thin boy?

How did you know that? Pete exclaimed.

The Limping Man

I have ways, De Groot snapped. Is his

family wealthy? Do they have an art collection? Are they buyers of art?

I think they have a small art collection, Bob acknowledged.

Jupiters voice was innocent. We really dont know Skinny Norris very well, sir. Not even where he lives, Im afraid.

Then you cannot help me? De Groot watched them all.

I wish we could, sir, Jupiter said.

Yes, De Groot said, still watching them. Then in case the paintings are returned here, you will call me at The Dunes Motel, yes? Remember, I will pay you

well.

The boys nodded, and De Groot turned and walked off towards the entrance gate of the junkyard. Bob and Pete both stared after the art dealer. De Groot had a slight limp!

Jupe! Bob cried. He has a

Yes, Records, he has a limp, said Jupe. That was the first thing I noticed when he began to pace a few minutes ago. As if he hurt his leg recently, fellows.

Maybe from a fall into a gorge!

He could be that intruder we chased a week ago! Bob said.

That's why you didn't want to tell him about Skinny, Pete said, and that

Skinny's painting was old Joshua Camerons.

That was one reason, yes, Jupiter agreed.

Bob asked, What was another reason, First?

I saw his car outside the yard, Jupiter said. Look.

Outside the junkyard the art dealer was getting into a small, blue coup' e! As they watched, he drove away.

Its the car thats been following the Countess! Pete cried.

And I told him about Skinny and the painting, Bob groaned.

You didnt tell him much, Jupiter said consolingly, and I dont think what you said mattered. I think Mr De Groot knew something about Skinny before he came here, and I think we had better get to Skinny again pretty fast!

Lets go! Pete said.

I cant go now, fellows, said Bob. Ive got to run an errand for my mother.

Jupiter thought. All right, Bob, well go

on ahead with the homing transmitter, and you can bring the receiver later if your errand wont take long.

It wont! Bob said.

Good. Then well meet at Skinneys house.

Skinny Norriss house was a big redwood house on a small street of beach houses. It was right on the beach. An alley ran between the houses directly across the street from it. The whole street was thick with palms and hibiscus bushes.

Pete and Jupiter stopped their bikes behind a big hibiscus, across the street and some distance down from the Norris

house. From there they could see the front and side entrances to the house, and the only entrance to the garage.

Skinny's sports car was parked there.

Well talk to him first, Jupiter decided.

They walked their bikes up the path to the front door. A window on the first floor opened, and Skinny leaned out.

The Limping Man

What do you so-called detectives want now?

We just want to buy that painting, Skinny, Pete called up.

Skinny laughed. Go fly a kite, Crenshaw!

We know you have the painting, Skinny, Jupiter said.

Yah yah! You dont know anything. Get out of here before I call the police on you for trespassing!

Looking dejected, Pete and Jupiter rode their bikes away until they were out of sight of the house. Then they walked the bikes back to the thick hibiscus, where they crouched, hidden.

Ill sneak up on Skinnys car from the beach and plant the homer on it,

Jupiter said. You watch the front and side doors of the house, and the garage, Pete. If Skinny comes out, whistle a warning.

Okay, Pete agreed, and Ill watch for Bob.

Jupiter turned to slip away towards the beach. The stout First Investigator

suddenly stopped.

Someones near Skinnys house! he whispered urgently.

Pete looked. A man in a uniform was turning into the narrow path on the far side of Skinnys house. His cap was low on his forehead, shading his eyes.

He walked awkwardly, as if thrown off balance by the heavy tool kit he carried.

Its just a telephone man, Pete said, taking a breath.

Jupiter watched the telephone man disappear behind Skinnys house. He frowned. Yes, I guess so. Only ...

Only what, First? Pete said.

I dont know, Jupiter said slowly, and looked down the quiet, empty street.

Somethings odd, but I cant put my finger on it.

Ill keep my eyes open, Pete promised.

Jupiter nodded, and slipped away towards the beach. Pete settled behind the hibiscus to watch Skinnys house.

A small creek came down to the beach between Skinnys house and the next house. Dry now in summer, it was a good place for Jupiter to hide, and sneak up close to the garage without being

seen.

Skinny was nowhere in sight. Jupiter checked the tiny homer transmitter, which contained a magnet that would hold the device on Skinnys car. Jupiter had made the instrument himself in his workshop. The transmitter sent out a tiny beep-beep signal that got louder and faster as you got nearer to it. The receiving instrument picked up the signal and also showed, by an arrow on a dial, the direction the signal came from.

All the boys had to do was plant the transmitter on a car, and with their receiver they could follow the car from far enough away to remain unseen.

Jupiter started to creep along the creek bed, and stopped. He saw that the telephone repairman had circled Skinnys house and was now on the garage side.

He was bent over, working on the wires where they entered the house. Suddenly

Jupiter realized what had seemed odd to him about the telephone man there had been no telephone van out on the street!

Whoever heard of a telephone man without his van? The repairman was an imposter! Yet he was working on the telephone wires. Maybe tapping Skinnys phone? Forgetting about putting the homer on Skinnys car, Jupiter began to

The Limping Man crawl along the dry creek bed to a spot where he could spy on the fake telephone man.

It was hard work for the overweight boy. He was puffing when he reached the place that he judged was right behind the telephone man. When his panting had subsided, he raised his head carefully above the creek bank.

Ullppp!

Jupiter found himself looking straight into the face of the fake telephone man. Only a foot away, the dark eyes glared at

Jupiter the eyes of the Dutch art dealer,
De Groot!

The Dutchman held a wicked-looking
knife, and glared menacingly.

Pete, crouched behind the hibiscus, had
seen no sign of Skinny or of Jupiter.

Bob still had not arrived with the homer
receiving instrument.

The Limping Man

Pete!

The voice came from behind the house directly across the street from Pete, from the direction of the beach.

Pete! Help!

Pete ran across the quiet street and turned behind the house. A hand clamped over his mouth. Another hand twisted his arm. Pete was captured!

The Limping Man

Prisoners!

Bob saw the two bikes as he rode up towards Skinnys house. Pete and Jupiters bikes behind a hibiscus! But where were the two investigators? In dismay, Bob looked up and down the empty street.

As he brought his bike abruptly to a halt, he heard a car start in the alley across from Skinnys house. A blue coup' e came tearing out of the alley, turned right with a squeal of tyres, and raced away along the street.

Bob stared after the blue coup' e. The art dealers car! What had De Groot been doing?

Beep-beep-beep-beep!

Bob heard the sudden beeping from his pocket. He pulled out the homing receiver. The arrow was pointing right up the street, and the beeps were loud and rapid but slowing and diminishing. Bob guessed at once what had happened.

Jupiter and Pete had not placed the homer on Skinnys car. They had it with them! And they were in the blue coup' e of the art dealer, De Groot!

Frantically Bob rode his bike after the

blue coup' e, which was already out of sight. He followed the beeps of the homer, and reached the main coast road. He pursued the beeps left towards the northern outskirts of Rocky Beach. Twice he lost the beeps when the blue coup' e pulled too far away, and twice he picked up the beeps again as the coup' e was forced to stop for something like traffic lights.

Bob stopped for nothing, not even for the traffic lights. But the third time he lost the beeps, they did not start again.

In despair, Bob pedalled on, searching the main road along the coast, looking up and down the empty side streets as Rocky Beach thinned into open country.

Bound with telephone cord and gagged, Pete and Jupiter lay squeezed into the boot of De Groot's blue coup' e. Just before the car had left the alley across from Skinnys house, Jupiter had managed to turn on the homer. Both boys thought they had heard the squeak of bicycle brakes out on the street. But now some ten minutes had passed, and the blue coup' e had stopped or slowed only twice.

There was no way that Bob could follow them now, even if he did know that

De Groot had captured them.

Mentally, Jupiter kicked himself for not

recognizing that the repairmans awkward gait was actually De Groots limp.

Another ten minutes, no more, and the blue coup' e turned off the road and parked. The boot was flung open. De Groot pulled the boys out one at a time

Prisoners!

and hurried them into the end row of chalets in a small motel. The dark-eyed art dealer had not said a single word since he had caught Jupiter.

Inside the motel room, De Groot sat the

boys side by side on a couch, ungagged them, took out his evil-looking knife, and sat facing them. His deep eyes glittered angrily.

So! This Skinny Norris did not bring to you the right painting. You were not interested in his painting. You did not even know where he lived, eh? Liars!

You want to steal old Joshuas paintings for yourselves!

We do not! Pete said hotly. Were finding them for the Countess. They belong to her!

Ah, that is it, eh?

You are working with the Countess and Armand

Marechal. What have they told you?

That they want to recover the Countesss family heirlooms, Jupiter said.

Weve found everything except the paintings.

You lie again. You must know more. What are Marechals plans? What are they actually looking for? What message did Joshua Cameron send them?

What we know, Pete said, is that youve been following the Countess everywhere, and you were at Professor

Carswells house over a week ago trying to

Jupiter broke in quickly. Why do you think Joshua Cameron sent a message to the Countess? She wasn't close to

Do not try to fool me, boy! De Groot snapped, and he looked at Pete.

You were about to say that you know I was at Carswells house?

Pete swallowed. The Second Investigator realized that Jupiter did not want

De Groot to know that they suspected him of being the mysterious intruder a

week ago at Remuda Canyon.

Uhhh, we know you were at Professor Carswells house the first day the

Countess and Mr Marechal arrived, Pete said, a little lamely.

De Groot studied the boys fiercely. No. Someone was at Carswells before the Countess arrived. Someone mysterious, eh? And you two think it was me.

Why?

The boys were silent.

So? You will not reveal what made you suspect me? And you do not know of any

message sent by old Joshua? You have talked with Professor Carswell and his son. Perhaps old Joshua gave them a spoken message, eh? Some last words?

We dont know of any, sir, Jupiter said politely.

The art dealer studied them. Bah! I think you are stupid boys who do not know what you are doing!

He glared at the boys, and stood up. But perhaps you know too much, eh?

De Groot held his long knife and watched the boys malevolently.

Bob rode his bike onwards along the

coast road in an agony of indecision.

Alone, what chance did he have of finding the blue coup' e? But if he stopped to call Chief Reynolds, he could lose any trail his friends tried to leave.

So he rode on as fast as he could. The road north of town was now lined with motels. He listened for the beep of the homer, and looked for the blue car.

Prisoners!

De Groot had been limping around the room, holding his wicked knife, for some ten minutes. He did not seem to be able to make up his mind.

What must I do with you, eh? You are a nuisance, confound it! You are in my way, bah!

Jupiter gulped. Is there something valuable in Joshua Camerons ... ?

You are annoying me! De Groot growled. What would you say to

working for me instead of the Countess?

We already have a client, Jupiter said stiy.

Foolish boy! Well, I cannot let you

The ringing of the telephone made the art dealer whirl. He stared at the instrument as if it were a snake. Then, watching the boys, he backed to the phone and picked up the receiver.

Yes? he said, and his eyes suddenly lighted. What? A boy? ... Norris? ... Yes, I know him ... No, do not send him here, I will come to the office.

Hold him there!

As De Groot hung up, his grin was triumphant. It seems I must postpone tending to you two. The boy you hardly know, Master Norris, is here to see me!

Pete groaned. I knew Skinny was up to something!

You cant trust Skinny Norris, Mr De Groot, Jupiter said.

I trust no one, boy, De Groot snapped.

He gagged the boys again, and left the unit the back way. Pete and Jupiter struggled in their bonds, but it was no use. They sank back on the couch

just as the back door opened again!

Helpless, the boys stared at the opening door.

Bob stood there grinning at them.

Then the smallest of the trio hurried to them, untied their bonds, and removed the gags.

Boy! Pete exclaimed. Are we glad to see you. How did ... ?

I followed the homer, but then I lost it. I just kept on riding. Id almost given up when I picked up the signal again. I still didnt know where you were

until I remembered the name of De Groots motel: The Dunes.

Good work, Records, Jupiter said. Now lets go!

But what about Skinny? Pete objected. Hes in the motel office right now, probably selling De Groot the paintings.

Bob laughed. Skinny isnt selling anything. He isnt even here. That was me on the telephone. De Groot is so eager, he didnt notice my voice wasnt the motel receptionists.

But by now he knows, Jupiter said. Out the front, quick!

They hurried to the front door. The coast was clear. They ran across the motel grounds to Bobs bike.

Pete can pedal, Jupiter decided. Hes the strongest. Ill ride on the back, and Bob can ride on the handlebars. Hurry!

They had pedalled less than twenty yards when they heard a cry of rage behind them. De Groot was in front of the room they had just left. He began to run after them, but he limped, and even on the overloaded bike they pulled away. De Groot turned and ran back towards the motel.

Hell get his car! Jupiter said. We have to hide.

No, we dont, Bob said, and held up a handful of coloured wires. I pulled the ignition wires from his car.

Prisoners!

Fine thinking, Records, Jupiter said admiringly. However, hell find another car soon. I suggest we pedal fast.

Pete puffed and groaned. What do you mean

we

?

Minutes later, a man in a truck stopped to give them and the bike a lift into

Rocky Beach. They retrieved the other two bikes, and rode home just in time for their dinners. Before they went to bed, they met once more in Headquarters.

Jupiter was serious. There is something very strange about it all. De Groot seems to think there is something important that old Joshua Cameron would have left a message about. We must talk to the Countess and Mr Marechal.

But there was no answer to their telephone call.

Well try again in the morning, Jupiter decided. Meanwhile, I think we must learn more about Joshua Cameron. First thing tomorrow, Bob you will research

old Joshua at the library.

A Sudden Suspicion

In the library the next morning, Bob hurried straight to the reference section.

He worked part-time at the library and the librarian, Miss Bennett, smiled at him as he walked by her. He found the art reference shelves and stared.

Almost all the big, heavy art volumes were gone!

Miss Bennet looked up as Bob came out from the shelves.

Is something wrong, Robert?

Miss Bennett, where are all the art reference books?

A man has them all in the small reading room. Hes been here since we opened, and yesterday, too. Do you want one in particular? I could ask him if he has finished with it.

No, thank you, Bob said quickly. Ill just look up something else until hes finished.

The moment he was out of Miss Bennetts sight, Bob hurried to the small reading room. He looked in cautiously. He saw the high pile of art books, and someone

hidden behind them. As he watched, the person took another book off the pile, and Bob saw his face Professor carswell!

Bob ducked back quickly. His mind raced. Professor Carswell was studying all the art books! Excited, Bob made himself sit quietly where he could watch the door to the small reading room. He wondered if he should follow the Professor. But by the time Professor Carswell came out of the small room, Bob had decided that Jupiter would want him to do his research first. They could always locate the Professor.

So he collected all the books Professor Carswell had returned, and settled down

to research old Joshua Cameron.

Jupiter frowned. Professor Carswell was studying the same books?

He sure was, First, Bob said. All the art books!

Gosh, Pete said. Why is he so interested in art?

The three boys were in their hidden trailer in the junkyard. It was well after lunch, and Bob had just arrived with his report. Jupiter pondered the news of

Professor Carswell and Bobs research.

But you found absolutely nothing about

Joshua Cameron in all those reference books? Jupiter said slowly.

Not a word, Bob said. And two of the books list every artist in the world.

At least, they say they do.

Its possible he might be listed elsewhere, Jupiter decided. But that would still make him very obscure.

Then why would De Groot want his paintings so much? Pete wondered.

A Sudden Suspicion

Maybe its not the paintings he really wants, Bob suggested. Maybe theres something else valuable that old Joshua had, and that the Countess and

Mr Marechal dont know about.

Jupiter nodded. That would explain that mysterious intruder the first day.

Perhaps he wanted to get whatever is valuable before anyone came to claim old

Joshuas things. But the Professor sold them to Uncle Titus, and that intruder is still trying to find whatever it is.

Just the way that De Groot is doing! Pete

said.

Then what makes Professor Carswell so interested in art books all of a sudden? Bob wanted to know.

Jupiter scratched his nose. You recall that De Groot was interested in a message, any last words of old Joshuas. Perhaps there was a message. Hal said the old man was delirious, and babbling. Perhaps he was trying to give a message, and Professor Carswell knows something we dont.

And something the Countess doesnt! Bob said.

I think, Jupiter said, that we will take a

ride out to Remuda Canyon.

Hal Carswell said, Gosh, no, guys, I dont know why my Dad would study art books.

The four boys were on the shaded front lawn of the big house in Remuda Canyon.

Did old Joshua talk much about his paintings? Jupiter asked.

Not much, Hal said. He tried to teach me to paint, but I cant even draw. I remember he did say something funny once. He said he was the most expensive painter in the world, but that no one

knew it! He laughed when he said that. I dont know why.

It sure doesnt make much sense, Pete declared.

No, it certainly doesnt seem to, Jupiter agreed.

Hal said, I dont understand whats going on, guys. Old Joshua lived here alone and no one ever came to see him. But now that hes dead, everyone is interested in him. The Countess and Mr Marechal are inside the house now talking to Dad again.

Gosh, maybe theyve discovered something! Pete said.

Lets find out, Jupiter decided.

In the living-room of the big, old house, Professor Carswell leaned on the mantelpiece facing Mr Marechal and the Countess. The Countess smiled when she saw the boys.

Ah, our young detectives. Still at work? You have indeed done well so far, the elegant lady said.

We havent found the paintings yet, maam, Jupiter said. Didnt Joshua ever show or sell his work?

No, Jupiter, he was a simple amateur. Still, I would like to have his last

paintings. I hope you will continue searching, and find them.

We will, Jupiter said, and added, if someone else doesnt get them before we do.

Someone else? Mr Marechal said, his voice puzzled.

A man named De Groot, who calls himself an art dealer, Jupiter said.

Hes been following you, and he wants Joshuas paintings.

A Sudden Suspicion

The First Investigator related De Groots actions, and told of the boys

narrow escape. The Countess was horrified.

Why, that is terrible! You boys must be careful. I cannot understand such an interest in my brother. What could the man really want?

I dont know yet, Jupiter admitted, but De Groot isnt the only one interested in paintings. Professor Carswell has been

studying art books in the library.

Everyone looked at Professor Carswell. Hal watched his dad uneasily. Mr Marechal glowered.

Are you aware of something we are not, Carswell? the silver-haired manager demanded.

No, Marechal. I was simply as puzzled as the Countess says she is, Professor Carswell said. I wondered about all this sudden interest in old Joshua, so I went to the library to see if he was known elsewhere. But I found nothing.

Which leaves me at a loss to explain the interest or the mysterious intruder who

came here earlier.

The Countess started. There was an intruder here, Professor? You mean, before Mr Marechal and I arrived? Someone who tried to steal some of Joshuas things, perhaps?

A week before you came, Countess, Bob explained, and we dont really know what he wanted.

I see, the Countess said, looking at Mr Marechal.

This De Groot, perhaps, Mr Marechal said. He seems to have some great interest in Joshua we dont understand.

He sure does! Pete agreed.

Professor Carswell and Hal, Jupiter said, De Groot seemed to think that old Joshua must have left some message for someone. You told us that Joshua was delirious and mumbling crazy words before he died. Could he have been trying to tell you something? Leave a message for someone?

Its quite possible, Jupiter. He was most insistent on trying to talk, the

Professor said. But I have no idea what he had on his mind. His words made no sense to me at all. Something about zigzag and wrong and canvas. He did say the word paintings a lot, and

something about masters. Hal was with him more at the end than I was. Do you recall much, Hal?

Hal nodded sadly. I cant remember exactly, but he kept babbling words like: Tell them, tell them ... zig ... zig when zag ... wrong way ... master ...

my paintings ... my canvas ... canvas ... wrong to zigzag ... tell em ...

wrong. Over and over, sort of like that. The same words.

They all looked at each other as if one of them might know what old Joshuas ramblings meant. But none of them did. Even Jupiter looked blank.

I cant make anything of that, Mr Marechal said.

No, the Countess sighed. Im afraid it was delirium.

Professor? Jupiter said. Did Joshua keep all his possessions in the cottage?

I believe he did, Jupiter, yes.

The First Investigator nodded. Well, wed better go. I still think Skinny

Norris knows who has the paintings.

Be careful, boys, the Countess said. Im quite worried about you. You will call us if there is any problem?

A Sudden Suspicion

The boys said they would. Outside, they got on their bikes and rode off.

As they passed the mouth of the small gorge, out of sight of the house, Jupiter suddenly turned left into the gully. Startled, Pete and Bob followed.

What are we doing, Jupe? Bob asked, confused.

Im convinced that old Joshua was trying to leave some message with those babbling words, Jupiter declared. I dont

know what message yet. But the old man never left the cottage, so if he hid anything it should still be there.

Follow me.

Leaving their bikes, they made their way along the gorge and into the cottage the back way. For a moment they stared around the silent cottage, trying to decide where to search first. All at once, they heard someone coming outside.

Quick! Jupiter whispered. Well hide and watch!

They watched from the bedroom, and saw Hal Carswell come into the cottage. The boy hurried to a corner of the living-

room, lifted up a loose board, and reached down under the floor. The Investigators stepped out.

So you know what old Joshua hid, Hal! Jupiter accused.

The boy jumped up, startled, hiding something in his hand.

A Black Hole

Wow! Hal gulped. You fellows sure scared me.

What did you take from under the floor! Pete demanded.

Take? Why, just this, guys. Hal showed them a large, old-fashioned key.

He stared at them. Hey, you came back to search the cottage! You think old

Joshua hid something?

We consider that a possibility, Jupiter acknowledged.

So do I! Hal said eagerly. After you left, I suddenly remembered something. Dads still talking to the Countess and Mr Marechal, so I came over here alone.

What did you remember, Hal? Bob asked.

That old Joshua used to store his paintings in the adobe back in the canyon.

Its empty my dad keeps it locked because its of historical interest and he doesnt want vandals damaging it. But I gave old Joshua the key when he first

came here.

And thats the key to the adobe? Jupiter asked.

Hal nodded. I figured that with Dad and the others talking, and you guys gone home, Id search the adobe by myself.

Maybe wed all better go, then, Jupiter decided.

In the afternoon sun, Hal led the trio of investigators along the gorge away from the road. The gully wound past the Carswell house and then curved rather sharply back into the canyon. After a while Hal struck off to the left into the brushwood. The other boys followed,

breaking through the thick, tangled growth until they reached a small clearing of hard-baked clay. In it was a low house with a wooden roof and shuttered windows. The old cabin, built of the local sun-dried clay brick called adobe, was silent and remote.

It was built by the original Spanish owners of the canyon, Hal explained.

At least a hundred and fifty years ago. The only heats a fireplace, and theres no bathroom.

Hal unlocked the door, which was made of thick hand-hewn planks, with wrought-iron bands and hinges. Inside, the boys saw that the adobe was almost

completely empty. The wooden floor was thick with dust and dirt. Beyond the small main room, there was a smaller bedroom and a kitchen. The few windows were set in deep embrasures and shuttered from outside. A dim light filtered through the cracks in the shutters, and it was cool.

Gosh, Pete said, the walls must be three feet thick!

Thats how they built with adobe, Jupiter informed them. Adobe doesnt have the strength of normal brick, so it has to be built thick to carry the weight.

Pete, you see what you can find in the kitchen, and Bob, you look in that

bedroom. Hal and I will examine this main room.

A Black Hole

Jupiter and Hal found unused canvases and cans of linseed oil and thinner, but no finished paintings. There was one ornate gold frame. Jupiter looked at the thick frame with a thoughtful expression.

I wonder why old Joshua left this frame empty? he asked.

He had someone elses painting in it when he first came here, Hal said.

Just an imitation painting, you know? A print, he called it. He said he didnt like prints, and got rid of it.

But not the frame, Jupiter pointed out. Look at the design on the frame, Hal.

Why, its all zigzags! You think he was talking about this frame when he babbled about zigzags?

Its thick enough to hide something in.

The two boys examined the ornate frame, studying its joins and pressing on all the zigzag ridges. Jupiter shook his head.

I cant see where anything could be

hidden, the First Investigator said.

Pete came from the kitchen. If theres anything hidden in that kitchen, its in the walls.

We cant see much out here, either, Hal said.

Fellows! Bob called from the bedroom. In here!

In the tiny bedroom, Bob stood over a battered old mattress that lay in a corner. Its cover had diagonal stripes.

Theres something inside this mattress, Bob said.

Pete felt the mattress where Bob indicated. Gosh, there sure is! Like a bag full of stones. Maybe jewels!

Cut it open, Second, Jupiter said excitedly.

Pete took out his pocket knife and cut open the old mattress. The boys crowded around to look inside. They saw a cache of small, dark, almost round little objects like stones.

What is it? Hal said perplexed.

Acorns and pine nuts, Jupiter said in chagrin. Its the storehouse of a ground squirrel or field mouse.

The boys all stared at the little cache of nuts, and then they began to laugh.

The difference between jewels and nuts was so great that it was hilarious. They laughed until the tears came down their faces.

They were laughing so hard that they did not notice the bedroom door swinging closed until it shut tight with a heavy thud!

Pete stopped laughing and stared at the door. What ... ?

There was a rasping sound as the bolt shot home outside, and they were locked into the bedroom.

Were locked in! Hal cried. Hey! Hey out there!

Open the door! Were in here! Bob shouted.

Pete began to pound on the heavy door. Hey!

Wait! Jupiter said.

The others stopped shouting and banging. Out in the main room someone was moving around. Whoever it was moved slowly, tapping the walls and floor, smashing the canvases and the one frame, banging linseed oil and thinner cans.

Its a search, Jupiter whispered.

The noisy search went on a few more minutes. Then all was silent. The outside door closed, and the boys heard it lock.

Oh no, groaned Hal. I left the key in the lock!

A Black Hole

They began to yell and pound on the walls again.

It was dark outside. Faint beams of moonlight came through the cracks in the heavy shutter on the single bedroom window.

Hours had passed. The boys had shouted themselves hoarse. The adobe was too far from the big house for them to be heard. The door and window were locked tight, and the walls were too thick to dig through with Petes pocket

knife. They had found a hollow spot under the floor where the basement was, but no way down. The boys sat on the old mattress, utterly discouraged.

Were already late for dinner, Pete groaned.

It looks to me like were going to be late for a lot more than dinner, Bob said gloomily. Were really trapped in here.

Were going to be in trouble at home, Jupiter said with a sigh.

Hal said, My dadll miss me soon. Hell find us.

You come out here a lot, Hal? Pete

asked.

No, Hal said uneasily, I guess not.
Anyway, theres a lot of other places

Id go first.

Then it could be a long wait for your
dad, Bob said.

The boys all thought about that in
silence. Pete got up and stamped on the
floor next to a wall cupboard that was
built out from one corner. The tall

Second Investigator listened to the
hollow sound.

If only we could get down to the

basement under here, Pete said. There might be a way out. But all weve got is my pocket knife.

Hal got up and stamped along the wall beside Pete, listening again to the hollow sound. I never knew there was a cellar under the adobe, he said. I

wonder why they built one. People dont have basements much in California.

No, they dont, said Jupiter. Especially not in an old adobe. He thought a moment and suddenly sat up excitedly. Of course, of course! They didnt build cellars under these old adobes. But when the Americans and Spanish people were enemies, they often built escape

tunnels! I think theres a passage under there!

Jupiter studied the little room. I would think there would be a way down to an escape passage from every room, but ... His eyes fixed on the cupboard door. We didnt really examine that cupboard, fellows!

Pete got to the cupboard first. It was a narrow cupboard with a heavy layer of dust and dirt on the floor. Bob and Pete brushed away the grime. Pete took out his pocket knife and probed in the cracks between the floor boards.

This section moves! Pete cried.

Bob and Pete lifted up a whole section of floor. Under it was dirt, and a trap door with a rusted iron ring in the centre. Bob and Pete grabbed the ring, and the trap door swung up, revealing a narrow black hole. The boys stared down.

Can anyone see the bottom? Bob asked nervously.

No, Hal said. Its just all black.

If you fellows think Im jumping down a hole when I cant see the bottom,

Pete declared, youre crazy! Ill stay here.

Whoever locked us in might come back, Jupiter said.

Oh, no! Pete moaned. Okay someone go first!

If only we hadnt left our torches on the bikes, Jupiter said.

A Black Hole

The black hole gaped up at them.

It was Bob who finally stepped up to the hole.

Well, here goes, the smallest boy said.
Geronimo, fellows!

Bob lowered himself into the hole, held on to the edge for a moment and dropped down into the blackness.

A Chase in the Night

Jupiter, Pete and Hal peered down into the black hole.

Bob? Pete called.

A voice rose out of the blackness. Its a dirt tunnel, all right, fellows. I

cant see anything, but I can feel the walls. Wait a minute.

The three boys up in the cupboard heard movement below. It seemed hours, but it was only minutes before Bob spoke

again.

The tunnel only goes about six feet one way, back under the living-room.

Theres another trap door at the end, but I cant budge it. Besides, our friend locked the front door, too. The other way, going away from the house, seems clear.

Pete was uneasy. How do we know where it goes, Jupe?

We could get lost, Hal said.

Jupiter bit his lip. He called down, Bob? How is the air down there? Can you feel any movement of air?

No movement, Bob said, but the air seems fresh, all right.

Up in the cupboard Jupiter hesitated. He looked down into the black hole.

Where did it lead?

This tunnel might be very dangerous, the leader of the Investigators said at last. If it caves in, thats the end of The Three Investigators and Hal.

But were not getting anywhere just sitting in this room. And I dont think we should risk waiting for the one who locked us in to come back. This time he might ...

You just convinced me, Pete said hastily.

The Second Investigator lowered himself into the black hole, and dropped from sight. Hal went next, and finally Jupiter.

At the bottom of the narrow tunnel they all tried to see each other, but it was too dark in the passage. It was also cold. Each of the boys sensed the others shivering.

Wed better move, Pete said, taking charge. Ill lead, Jupe comes second, then Hal, and Bob at the rear. Each of you hold on to the belt of the person in front, so we dont lose anyone. Okay, lets go.

They went slowly along the pitch black passage, Pete feeling his way at each step. The passage had a low ceiling, and they had to crouch as they inched along.

It seems to be going straight, Pete announced after a time. But Im not sure. Ive lost my sense of direction.

In complete darkness, the four boys moved cautiously on. Each time Pete took a step, it seemed harder to put his foot down. They spoke less and less, the dark and silence deep in the earth weighing them down.

A Chase in the Night

Pete, Jupiter said, did I feel something moving?

They all froze.

Air? Bob said. Is the air moving, fellows?

Pete moved ahead a little faster. There was a small turn in the passage

and they all saw it ahead. A patch of lighter darkness!

Its an opening! Pete cried.

Another twenty steps, and they stood out in the open night. For a few moments they just grinned at each other. They

were safe out of the adobe, and out of the terrible blackness of the passage. The moonlight seemed as bright as day after the tunnel.

Were in the gorge, Hal said, looking around.

The steep sides of the gorge reached above them. When they looked back at the mouth of the small tunnel, they saw that it was completely hidden by an

A Chase in the Night overhang of the bank and a thick growth of trailing plants in front of it.

Now, Jupiter announced, undaunted, well go back and ...

Agghhhh! A cry echoed through the moonlight.

A sharp cry not ten yards away, ending in a crash and a heavy thud!

What the ... ? Pete quavered.

A form loomed up before them in the

night.

Whos here? a rough voice said. So! You kids!

The boys saw the fierce face of the so-called art dealer, De Groot, like a ghost in the moonlight. He limped towards them, his suit covered with dust and debris as if he had fallen into the gorge.

The boys ran.

Stop, you ... !

They ran towards the far end of the gorge where they had left their bikes.

Behind them, the art dealer pursued,

stumbling in the rocky gully. They ran faster in the night.

There are the bikes! Pete cried.

Pete redoubled his speed and ran full tilt into a man! Hands grabbed him but Pete broke away.

Watch out! Pete cried. Run, guys!

The man tried to intercept the other boys, who dodged around him.

Hal! Its me!

Dad!

Professor Carswell stood in the

moonlight beside the boys bikes.

De Groot, Pete panted. Hes chasing us!

He locked us in the old adobe! Hal exclaimed.

We found a secret tunnel, Bob said, or wed still be there!

The Professor peered back up the gorge. I dont see anyone behind you now, boys.

The gorge was silent in the moonlight.

He was there, sir, Jupiter said, and told about what had happened in the old adobe. After he trapped us, he searched the adobe, too. He must have had the

same idea we did.

And someone just searched the cottage again, Professor Carswell said. I

expect it was this De Groot, too.

Sure it was, Dad, Hal said. Then he must have come back to get us, found us gone, and tried to catch us again. But he fell into the gorge, and we heard him in time to run.

If I hadnt been looking for Hal, and found the bikes, you could all have been in serious danger, Professor Carswell said. You didnt do anything wrong, I

admit. But I dont like this De Groot

being around. This could be getting too serious for boys!

A Chase in the Night

Jupiter Makes Some Deductions

When The Three Investigators returned home that evening, they all received scoldings for missing dinner. Aunt Mathilda muttered that the devil found work for idle hands, but she was fortunately distracted from assigning extra chores to

Jupiter by the start of her favourite television programme. Pete was supposed to have mowed the lawn after dinner, and his father told him to do it

first thing in the morning. So when Pete finally scrambled up into Headquarters the next day, he found that he was the last to arrive.

Had to mow the lawn, fellows, Pete started to explain.

He stopped. Jupiter and Bob sat slumped around the desk. Bob was totally dejected, and Jupiter looked ill.

You look like someone died! Pete said. No, I dont mean that. With us, that could be true. But whats wrong, guys?

Mr Marechal just fired us, Bob said sadly.

Jupiter sighed. He called a few minutes ago. Professor Carswell told him what happened last night at the adobe. Mr Marechal said that the situation was becoming too dangerous and the police should be called in. He didnt think we could do much more anyway. Hes going to send a small bonus.

Gosh, Pete said, dropping into a chair. Our first failure!

With so much that is still confusing, Jupiter moaned.

Well, Bob said glumly, I guess well just have to stay confused.

Jupiter nodded slowly, but the stout

leader of the trio said nothing for a time. His eyes seemed to be seeing something very far away. Pete watched him.

Dont turn in your badge yet, Bob, said Pete. Ive got a hunch Jupiter isnt going to stay fired, or confused. But Mr Marechal might get mad if we keep nosing around, Jupe.

Then we must convince him to allow us to continue, Jupiter declared.

The Three Investigators do not leave a case until it is completed!

How do we convince him to let us go on? Bob asked.

By showing him that there is more to this affair than he realizes. A mystery, Records! And by proving to him that we are the ones to solve the puzzle!

Pete shook his head. I dont know, First. Maybe Mr Marechal is right. We dont have much to go ahead on.

But we do! We have Joshua Camerons last words, and our deductions.

What deductions? Pete said.

Jupiter leaned across the desk. First, that old Joshua must have had something more valuable, or at least important, than was suspected. Second, that

Jupiter Makes Some Deductions
possibly more than one person knows
this. Third, that the missing twenty
paintings are somehow part of the secret.
And, fourth, that old Joshuas last
delirious words were meant as a
message!

The round-faced leader of the team sat
back. Now all we have to do is solve the
riddle of Joshua Camerons last words
provided weve been told the true words.

You think Hal and his dad are lying?
Bob exclaimed.

We know the Professor needs money,

Jupiter said. We know that Joshua didnt pay his rent the last months, and the Professor actually advanced him money. The Professor could have known there was something valuable all along, or he could have guessed it when that intruder broke in that first day.

I dont think Hal would lie, Pete objected.

Perhaps not, Jupiter said. Then let us assume that Joshuas last words are correct as reported. I have written them down as Hal and the Professor told them.

Jupiter took out a sheet of paper and put it on the table.

According to the Professor, Joshua used the words paintings, zigzag, wrong, canvas

, and masters

, Jupiter read. Hal, who was with the old man more, reports in greater detail. He said that Joshuas babbled words were more like:

Tell them ... zig when zag ... wrong way ... master ... my paintings ... my canvas ... wrong to zigzag ... tell em ... wrong.

Over and over like that, at least in general.

Pete scratched his head.

Tell them sounds like a message, and zig when zag and wrong way sound as if Joshua was giving directions. Some way is wrong.

But whats the right way?

Yes, Jupiter agreed, that part seems missing. Only, you notice that the second time Hal used the word wrong

, it was by itself without the word way

.

What does that mean, Jupe? Bob asked.

I dont really know, Jupiter said lamely, and theres another difference, too. Hal reports the words tell them the first time, and tell em the second time.

We all say tell em when we mean tell them, Pete said.

I suppose thats all it is, Jupiter admitted.

Bob studied the words.

Master and my paintings could mean that Joshua thought his paintings were masterpieces even though he was only an amateur.

My canvas

, and just canvas

, are a painters way of referring to his paintings.

De Groot seems to think Joshuas paintings are good, Pete said.

Bob cried, Maybe thats it! Maybe Joshua Cameron really was a good painter. A great painter, but eccentric, so he wouldnt show or sell his work!

Maybe De Groot thinks he could sell Joshuas paintings for a whole lot of money!

That could be, but then Joshuas last words wouldnt be a message, Jupiter

pointed out. Im sure there is a message,
and one thing bothers me why did
Joshua say to tell them

? Who is them

?

The Countess and Mr Marechal, Pete
suggested.

Mr Marechal is only the Countesss
estate manager, Jupiter analysed.

Would Joshua lump them together as
them

? Wouldnt he give the message just for
his sister, and say tell her

? Or if its for someone else, say tell him

?

Unless he wanted to leave a message for more than one person. Maybe for a gang?

Jupiter Makes Some Deductions

A gang? Pete gaped.

A gang of crooks, maybe? Or smugglers? Jupiter said. Old Joshua kept to himself and never left the cottage almost as if he were scared. Maybe he was hiding out!

And De Groot is one of the gang, Pete guessed, looking for some loot, or for something smuggled into the country!

That would explain De Groots search of the adobe when he locked us in last night, Jupiter said, while Bobs idea that

Joshuas paintings are really valuable, wouldnt. De Groot wouldnt have smashed everything in the adobe if he was hunting for twenty paintings. Jupiter stopped, a worried expression on his face.

What is it, Jupe? Bob asked.

Im not sure, the First Investigator said slowly. While I was talking about last night at the adobe, something suddenly seemed wrong. At the back of my mind I feel Im missing a fact, but I cant put my finger on it.

I cant think of anything wrong last night, Pete said.

Perhaps not, Jupiter said. Anyway, I think we now have enough deductions to go to Mr Marechal and try to get him to let us continue. At least, Pete and I will go.

What do I do? Bob demanded.

We still want to find those paintings, Records. Im not ruling out your idea that they may be good after all, and may be what De Groot wants, Jupiter explained. Youll go and try again to talk to Skinny Norris. Learn where he got that one painting.

Jupiter Makes Some Deductions

Failure!

The Cliff House Motel was an elegant resort establishment on the Pacific Ocean a mile south of Rocky Beach. Pete and Jupiter parked their bikes and walked into the glittering main entrance hall. A tall, severe-looking man seated at the reception desk watched them suspiciously.

May I ask your business here, boys? the man said.

Pete became nervous, but Jupiter was not easily intimidated. The stout boy

drew himself up as tall as possible, and when he spoke his voice had a rich

English accent!

Announce us to the Countess, my good man, Jupiter said, looking down his nose at the clerk. Jupiter Jones the Fourth, and Mr Peter Crenshaw. You may also inform Monsieur Marechal we are here.

Pete could barely keep from laughing. He had seen Jupes act before, but the assistant at the reception desk had not. The man hesitated uncertainly.

Jupiter sounded for all the world like some English lord.

On second thought, Jupiter said, if you will be so kind as to inform me of Armands room number, we shall present ourselves personally.

Er, the desk clerk said, Mr Marechal is in cottage ten. Ill get a porter ...

I shouldnt bother, my good man, Jupiter said grandly. I expect we shall manage. Come, Peter.

Still looking down his nose, Jupiter paraded majestically through the hall and out the side door into the beautiful grounds of the elegant motel.

Once out of sight of the desk, Jupiter dropped his act and laughed. Cottage ten

is to the left by that sign, Pete.

That act is going to get us into trouble some day, Pete said. At least a punch in the nose!

I hardly think so. Employees in expensive places are easily intimidated.

They have to be very careful not to offend anyone who might be important,

Jupiter observed.

They followed a narrow path through evergreen shrubs. They could hear the motel guests swimming and laughing in the motel pool and conversing on the cocktail terrace. Single cottages, as well

as rows of less expensive rooms, were scattered throughout the secluded grounds.

Here is cottage nine, Jupiter said, which means that cottage ten will be next around this palm tree.

The boys came round the palm tree and stopped. Someone was standing at a window of cottage ten, peering inside! As they watched, the snoopers went to Mr Marechals door and tried to force it open.

Jupe! Pete burst out. Its ...

Failure!

Too loud, Petes voice startled the snooper, who turned quickly to stare towards the boys.

Skinny Norris! Jupiter finished for Pete.

Their enemys mouth dropped open for a moment, like a surprised scarecrow.

Then, as the boys started towards him, Skinny whirled and dashed off through the heavy vegetation of the motel grounds.

After him, Second! Jupiter cried.

Pete went after the lanky youth, racing

among the palms and hibiscus.

Jupiter realized that he himself had no chance of catching Skinny by direct pursuit. He analysed the situation, and saw that Skinny would have to circle back on the far side of the pool if he was to escape through the front of the motel. With Pete cutting off his rear, Skinny had to go that way! Jupiter began to run directly towards the pool.

He reached the cocktail terrace, and puffed out on to the green concrete to pass the pool itself. He was watching across the pool for a glimpse of Skinny or Pete, and completely failed to see Mr Marechal until the small, silver-haired estate manager was directly in front of

him.

Awwkk! Jupiter cried, and stopped just before he would have run right into the man.

Jupiter! What the devil are you doing? Mr Marechal thundered. Is this your detective method? To trample me?

Sir, Jupiter panted, we just discovered Skinny Norris breaking into your cottage! Pete is pursuing him now, and I was attempting to intercept him!

That boy who had one of Joshua Camerons paintings?

Yes, sir. If Pete can

At that moment, Pete came walking dejectedly around the pool from the direction of the main entrance.

He got away, Pete said. Im sorry, Mr Marechal.

Unfortunate. Mr Marechal frowned. What on earth was he doing at my cottage?

Are the things we recovered for the Countess in your cottage, sir? Jupiter asked. Joshua Camerons possessions?

Yes. But what would young Norris want with them? A stuffed owl? Silverware? Binoculars? What earthly ... Mr Marechal broke off. He was looking at

the terrace. I think the Countess wants us to join her. She is concerned in this.

The boys saw the Countess at a table on the terrace. They followed Mr Marechal to her. The Countess was worried.

Are you in trouble, boys?

Mr Marechal quickly explained about Skinny Norris, and waved the boys to seats. But you didnt come here to chase young Norris, eh? I presume you had some reason?

Let us stay on the case, sir, Pete blurted out. Weve

Wed like you to, boys, but ...

Weve made some deductions, sir, Jupiter hurried on, and he explained how they had concluded that Joshua Cameron had had something valuable, that someone knew this, that the missing paintings were involved somehow, and that old Joshuas last words were a message. We think there are two possible explanations, sir. First, that perhaps old Joshua was a good painter after all, and his paintings would be worth a lot, and De Groot knows this. Or, 54

Failure!

second, that Joshua was secretly part of

a gang, and has hidden some valuable loot or some smuggled treasure!

Gang? the estate manager said. You mean criminals? The Countesss brother? Preposterous, boys!

Still, the Countess said slowly, this man De Groot does appear to want something, and he doesnt sound a pleasant man.

Jupiter said, Joshua could have been a dupe, sir.

Hmmmm, Mr Marechal mused, looking at the Countess. Old Joshua was eccentric. You may have hit on something, boys. If so, it is more

dangerous than ever, and a police matter.

But, Mr Marechal, Jupiter protested, we can help !

Absolutely out of the question! Im sorry.
Good-bye, boys.

Slowly, Pete and Jupiter got up and left the terrace. This time they had really failed!

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Failure!

A Sudden Attack

Jupiter and Pete walked slowly through the elegant motel hallway and out the front door to their bikes. They were so despondent that they did not notice the doorman coming after them. As Jupe began to mount his bike, he felt a restraining hand on his arm.

Are you two the investigators? the doorman demanded.

Pete swallowed. We ...

Speak up, boys! Are you or arent you?

Ye yes, sir, Jupiter stammered.

Follow me, then. Hurry up!

The boys looked at each other, shrugged, and meekly followed the doorman back into the hall. They saw the severe-looking man at the reception desk watching them, and messenger boys staring at them from every exit. What had they done now? The doorman directed them into a small side room, and closed the door behind them.

The Countess sat alone inside the room.

I had to see you before you left, she said, and smiled. I hated to see you so disappointed after youd worked so hard

for us.

You mean we can stay on the case! Pete cried.

Mr Marechal has changed his mind, maam? Jupiter asked.

No, and hes probably right, the Countess said. But youve shown me that youre intelligent and know what youre doing, and I think you are more responsible than Mr Marechal imagines.

We are, maam! both boys exclaimed at once.

I recall that your card says the Chief of Police believes in you, the Countess

went on. If I permit you to continue working for me, you'll promise to be careful?

We sure will! Pete declared.

Good, the Countess said, and her regal face became sad. I must know if your deductions have any truth. As I told you, I did not know my brother well.

He was an odd, secretive man. I ... I never knew what he really did all those years. He never seemed to have a home, and he had some strange friends.

He might only have been a dupe for crooks, Jupiter said.

Better that than a real criminal, but even so ... The Countess sighed.

You seem to have done fine work up until now, and I think you will find the truth for me. I want to know the truth about my poor brother once and for all.

Countess? Jupiter said. You didnt find anything in what we already recovered for you, did you?

A Sudden Attack

Nothing, Jupiter. Whatever do you think this valuable something could be? If there is something.

We dont know that yet, Jupiter admitted.

But you feel Joshua hid it somewhere, and that his last words were a message to someone? To say where it was?

Im sure of it, Jupiter said eagerly.

Very well, but be careful. Especially of this De Groot, whoever he is. Dont make me regret allowing you to go on. When you know more, return and report to me.

The regal lady smiled at the boys and dismissed them. Excited to be still on the case, they hurried out to their bikes.

As Pete and Jupiter scrambled up from Tunnel Two into Headquarters, they

found Bob waiting for them.

I've got news, fellows! Bob announced the moment his two partners entered.

So have we! Pete said.

Were back on the case, Records, Jupiter crowed, and told Bob all about what had happened at The Cliff House.

So that's where Skinny drove up from in such a wild hurry, Bob said. I

thought he looked scared. Gosh, it's great we're still on the case!

You saw Skinny at his house, Records? Jupiter asked. And you have some news

about him?

I sure do, Bob declared. When he came home, he just ran into his house and stayed there. But Id managed to have a talk with the Norrises gardener before that, and I found out where Skinny is working.

Is that important, Bob? Pete asked.

Where, Records? Jupiter said.

Hes been working as an assistant to Mr Maxwell James!

Pete was puzzled. Maxwell James? Is that supposed ...

The famous artist! Jupiter exclaimed, his eyes shining. His paintings are known all over the world, and he does live right here in Rocky Beach!

In a big mansion, with a separate studio, Bob remembered. It sure is a coincidence that were looking for paintings, and Skinny is working for a famous painter.

Too much coincidence, fellows, Jupiter said. After lunch, I think we must pay a visit to Mr Maxwell James.

They parked their bikes just outside the high iron gates to the estate of

Mr Maxwell James. They could see the

stone towers of a large, castle-like house above the trees on the heavily wooded grounds. The iron gates were open, and no one seemed to be around in the afternoon sun.

I guess we just walk in, Pete decided.

They went through the big gates, and started up a narrow, winding path through jungle-like vegetation. All at once, a loud, chilling scream echoed through the grounds. A scream like a woman or child in great pain.

What was that? Bob whispered.

I dont want to know, Pete moaned. Lets go!

The agonized scream came again.
Somewhere to the left.

A Sudden Attack

Someone needs help! Bob cried.

Come on, Jupiter said. Careful, and stay low!

They moved cautiously through the tangled shrubbery. The chilling scream sounded again directly in front of them! Jupiter parted some thick leaves, and they looked through the bushes at a small clearing.

A huge spotted cat crouched in the clearing!

Speechless, they looked at the green eyes that stared savagely at them. Even, as they watched, the tawny cat opened its fanged mouth and gave the high, agonized scream.

A leopard! Jupiter said. Run!

NO! Pete commanded. Dont run, guys. Stand still!

A voice spoke sharply from behind the boys. So! Ive caught you, have I?

Dont try to get away.

A Sudden Attack

They whirled to see a big, bear-like man with a red beard and thick red hair.

The mans eyes were angry, and he held a gleaming spear with a narrow blade at least three feet long!

Looking for somewhere to escape, the boys turned back towards the enor—

mous cat. With a sudden snarl, the leopard leaped straight at the boys!

The Haunted Paintings

The savage leopard hurled through the air at the boys and seemed to strike an invisible wall! It fell back to the ground. Bruised, it slunk away into the small clearing and crouched there, staring at them with its green eyes.

How ... ? Bob began, his voice shaking.

Pete reached out through the leaves in front of them. Only a foot away, his hand struck the invisible wall.

Glass! the Second Investigator said. The

leopards in a big glass cage.

Were so close to the glass, we cant see it. That whole clearing is inside a glass cage!

Of course it is, the red-bearded man said behind them. You didnt think anyone would let an African leopard roam loose in Rocky Beach, did you?

I ... I guess we werent thinking, said Jupe.

Bob asked, Why do you have it in that glass cage, sir?

How else could I study the animals movements, the play of its muscles, the

way it walks, sits, screams? the bearded man said.

You're the artist! Jupiter realized. Mr Maxwell James!

And you're painting the leopard, Bob guessed.

I am painting many African themes. For example, this spear here. It's a most unusual spear, with a very long, thin blade. A Masai spear. Made for lion hunting, but it has other uses! And Mr James aimed the long, savage spear straight at the boys. Now, what have you three trespassers been doing in my studio!

We havent been in your studio, Pete said hotly, and were not trespassers!

Then what are you doing sneaking around on my land?

Jupiter said, Were detectives, Mr James. We came here to talk to you about your assistant, Skinny Norris. But now

Norris? That young scamp! Now Im sure you three are up to no good!

March into my house. I shall call the police!

The artist levelled the menacing spear. Glumly, the boys marched into the big, castle-like house. Mr James herded them

into a book-lined study.

If you're calling the police, sir, Jupiter said, ask for Chief Reynolds. He knows us.

The Chief knows you? Mr James hesitated.

Jupiter seized the chance. If you would examine our cards, sir, it would help.

The stocky leader of the boys took out their cards and gave them to the artist. Mr James read them with a scowl.

This does appear to be the Chiefs signature, Mr James said grudgingly.

The Haunted Paintings

Call Alfred Hitchcock, the film director, if you still dont believe us! Pete said.

Alfred? Mr James glared. Now you have made a mistake! I

will call my good friend Alfred, to expose you!

The artist picked up the telephone and dialled. He asked for Mr Hitchcock.

Alfred? Max James, here. I have in my house a trio of young trespassers!

They ... What? Yes, those are their names, I have some cards of theirs. How did you know? ... I see, yes ... They are, are they? ... Very well, Alfred.

Good-bye.

The artist hung up, and considered the boys. So, you are detectives, after all. Alfred informs me that you are honest boys, and quite clever. No spear seems needed.

Mr James leaned his Masai spear in a corner.

Mr Hitchcock has helped us greatly, Jupiter said primly.

So he said, Mr James stated. However, he also says that involvement with you three is to be avoided at all costs, if I value my peaceful life, and that you tend to have somewhat wild imaginations. Hmmmm. Perhaps I need imaginations.

To solve the mystery in your studio, sir? Jupiter asked.

What? How do you know theres a mystery in my studio?

You accused us of doing something in your studio, the First Investigator said. So something has happened there. And you said you might need imagination, so whatever has happened must be a mystery.

That is clever deduction, yes.

Would it have anything to do with a stolen painting?

How the devil did you know that? Not stolen, but taken without permission and returned. I fired the culprit. But that has nothing to do with my mystery.

To put it bluntly, boys, I seem to have acquired some haunted paintings!

Haunted paintings? Bob and Pete exclaimed.

I can think of no other explanation, Mr James said. My studio is some distance from this house. The last two mornings, I

arrived to work and found that paintings had moved during the night. Other objects were out of place, too. Nothing missing, and no chaos just a few things where I didnt leave them.

Jupiter said, Are the haunted paintings like the one painting that was taken and returned, sir?

Why, yes! They are all ones I bought from a junkyard.

Then I think I can explain what has been happening, Jupiter said, and told about Joshua Cameron, the Countess and Mr Marechal, and De Groot. So

I think that someone has been entering

your studio to examine the paintings!

I see, Mr James said. There is only one problem. At night, there is no way in or out of my studio! At night, it is a completely locked room!

The Boys Set a Trap

A locked room? Bob cried.

Absolutely no way to get in or out, Mr James declared. Would you boys care to inspect the studio?

Yes, sir! Pete said.

They followed Mr James out of the big stone house and across the overgrown estate, past the leopard in its glass cage. The studio was also a stone building, with heavily barred windows and a massive iron door. As they went in,

Jupiter paused to study the modern, burglar-proof lock on the iron door.

It is guaranteed to take an expert an hour to pick that lock, my boy,

Mr James observed, and there are no marks on it anyway.

Inside, Jupiter turned first to inspect the hinges of the iron door. They were on the inside, and untouched.

Theres only the one door, Jupiter, Mr James said.

It was a large studio, equipped with racks for everything. Light poured in through two casement windows and a

big skylight. The windows, which opened inward, were solidly barred on the outside. The skylight did not open at all.

There was no fireplace or stove. A small exhaust fan was built high into the rear wall; an electric cord dangled from it down to a socket near the floor. The floor itself was solid stone, with no basement underneath. There were no hollow places in the floor or in any of the walls. A simple, solid, fortress-like room, with no way in or out except through the single door.

And I lock that every night, Mr James said.

Gosh, Pete said. Maybe earthquakes made the things move. We get little ones all the time.

No, Pete, Mr James said. The paintings werent just moved, they were in the wrong slots in their racks.

These racks here, Mr James? Jupiter said.

He pointed to a large rack filled with completed paintings.

No, thats my work, the artist said. The canvases I bought from the junkyard are over in that rack.

Mr James indicated a smaller rack that

held mostly blank canvases. Jupiter saw the edges of two of Joshua Camerons last paintings.

May we see all the paintings, Mr James? he asked.

Of course. Help me out with them, boys.

A few minutes later, all twenty paintings were spread around the studio, leaning on the walls and racks.

Why do you have them in that rack for unused canvases, Mr James?

Jupiter questioned.

The Boys Set a Trap

Because I bought them to paint over, and use for my own work. Most artists do that. Im always looking for used canvases. Last week I dropped by your uncles junkyard for the first time, on the odd chance that there might be some old paintings in stock, and I found these twenty.

Youll paint over them? Bob said.

Mr James nodded.

Then, Jupiter said, you dont think theyre very good? Theyre not worth anything?

Not to me, Jupiter, and I never heard of

Joshua Cameron, Mr James said.

But, as a matter of fact, these paintings show very good technique. Cameron was an extremely expert painter, amazingly so. Its indeed odd that he was totally unknown.

He never showed or sold his work, Pete explained.

An eccentric, you said, yes. Mr James nodded. Alas, the world may have lost a fine painter.

His work could have been great? Jupiter asked. I mean, sir, could someone have thought these paintings were valuable, and wanted to buy them?

Perhaps. Mr James looked thoughtfully at the paintings. But I doubt it. It takes more than the finest skill to make a great artist. You must have

feeling, style, something that makes your work different from anyone elses work. You notice how each of these paintings looks very different? As if each one were done by a different artist? Most artists have a style of their own.

Joshua Cameron doesnt seem to have had.

You mean most artists paint the same all the time? Bob asked.

They change, but not much. These

paintings have been done twenty different ways, none of them very original. Mr Cameron imitated the work of other artists instead of expressing a distinctive style of his own. No knowledgeable buyer of art would think these paintings were valuable.

May we examine them, sir? Jupiter asked.

Go right ahead, Jupiter.

The boys studied the paintings. There were no frames, just the canvases stretched on wood. In the end, they found nothing.

There sure isnt anything hidden in them,

Pete decided, and no messages

I can see.

No, Jupiter agreed, staring at the paintings. In each one, the cottage in

Remuda Canyon seemed to stare back. Then Jupiter bent down close to one.

Fellows! They seem to be numbered! This is number one, and ...

The boys hurriedly inspected the paintings again, and found a number on each one painted right on the picture in a corner. They moved them until they were in order. Then they stood back and looked at them again. So did

Mr James.

The paintings were now lined up so that the largest close-up of the cottage was first, and the view from farthest away was last.

I dont get any message, Pete said after a time.

Neither do I, Bob agreed.

You know, said Jupiter at last, the way theyre painted, the cottage looks like its shrinking. The trees in the front, the rocks, the canvas chair all stay the same size in each painting. But the house gets smaller until about all you can see in the last one is that porch awning.

The Boys Set a Trap

You're right, Jupe! said Bob. It does look like the house is shrinking instead of just being farther away. But what could that mean?

So now you have the mystery of the shrinking house, Mr James said, smiling, to go with my haunted paintings!

I know there's something important about these paintings, Jupiter said, and that's why someone has been in here moving them at night.

No one can get in here, Jupiter, Mr James said.

Jupiter shook his head firmly. There is no such thing as a locked room in which things move by themselves.

The First Investigator sat down on a long, rug-covered bench, and looked all around the studio. Mr James sat on a couch. Bob and Pete each took armchairs.

If we could catch the person who has been breaking in here, said Jupe, we might find out why the paintings are important.

How are we going to do that? Pete

asked.

Jupiter got up from the rug-covered bench and opened the door to the studios single cupboard. It was lined with shelves filled with cans, brushes, and other equipment, and had solid stone walls.

Theres only one way, Jupiter said. One of us must hide in this cupboard and see if anyone gets in the studio tonight!

All right, Jupiter. Ill hide in the cupboard, Mr James said.

No, sir. You have to lock the door and go away. Im certain you would be watched. An intruder would never come

in unless he was sure you had locked up and gone.

Gee, Bob said, I have to work for my dad tonight.

And I, Jupiter decided, must be outside to observe.

Pete groaned aloud. Just wait, fellows, Ill think of something I have to do somewhere else tonight!

We must know whats been happening, Pete, Jupiter said.

Sure, I want to know how things got moved in a locked studio, too. Pete shivered. But I dont think I want to be in

here when I find out!

Well be outside, Pete, Mr James assured him.

Jupiter outlined the plan for the evening. Then all three boys went home, and Jupe and Pete made arrangements to stay with Mr James overnight. After dinner, the two sneaked back into Mr Jamess estate and silently made their way through the shadowed jungle to the studio. They hid outside for a while, carefully looking and listening for signs of the mysterious intruder. When all seemed safe, Pete darted into the studio and slipped into the cupboard. With the door ajar a few inches, he could see both windows and half the room. Outside, Jupiter took up a

position in a clump of bushes from which he could watch the entrance to the studio.

Just before sunset, as Jupe had planned, Maxwell James came noisily down the path from the main house. The artist checked that Pete was in the cupboard, straightened up a few things in the studio, and locked the windows. Going outside, he clanged the iron door shut behind him and locked it. Then he strode noisily back to the house to wait for dark, when he would join Jupiter.

The Boys Set a Trap

A Locked Room

Through the crack in the cupboard door, Pete watched it grow dark outside the two barred windows. He was cramped in a sitting position, but did not want to move for fear of making a noise.

An hour passed.

Nothing happened. The cupboard grew hot and stuffy. Pete wondered if

Jupiter and Mr James were alert outside. His legs were going to sleep, and that made him nervous.

After a while the tall Second Investigator was hungry. He had brought some sandwiches, and now he cautiously opened one and tried to eat without making a sound.

Another hour passed.

Moonlight filtered through the heavy foliage of the trees, casting weird shadows. Jupiter and Mr James crouched behind thick bushes and watched the locked door.

By ten oclock they had seen nothing.

The studio remained dark and silent.

No one moved in the jungle-like grounds

of Mr Jamess estate.

Nothing had happened at all nothing out of the way, at least. The leopard paced and growled in its dark glass cage. A few insects chirred, and small night creatures rustled in the underbrush.

Jupiter shifted his weight restlessly and sighed.

Nothing happened.

Pete battled sleep. Cramped in the cupboard, hot and shut in, he felt his eyes grow heavy. Something seemed to be making his head feel light, sending waves of sleep over him.

He fought, but his eyes kept closing. Twice he forced himself out of a momentary doze. The third time he came awake, from a longer doze, he realized what was making his head feel so light fumes!

The cupboard was full of cans of paint and thinner and solvents. Their fumes were filling the cupboard. Because of the heat, the silence, and the heady fumes, Pete could not fight off sleep.

He dozed. How long, he did not know. But when he came slowly awake again it was in the studio!

Something!

Pete shook his head to clear it. Was he awake? Or was he still asleep? His mind seemed to swim in a thick haze.

A Locked Room

It, something, moved out in the studio. A thin shape floating in a moonlit glow. An eerie figure that seemed to pick up a painting and float with it to a barred window, where the painting vanished into thin air!

The ghostly figure hovered near the window for what seemed like hours. Pete desperately tried to wake up enough to do something.

A shimmering, twisting painting appeared near the odd figure again, The shape floated back with it to the rack, and took another painting to the barred window.

Pete tried to stand.

His legs would not move!

The hazy figure floated back towards him.

Pete tried to cry out.

Jupiter and Mr James heard the mued cry.

Help!

The cry was faint inside the studio!

Quick, Jupiter! Mr James said.

They leaped up and ran towards the iron door. The studio was still dark.

They heard no more sounds from inside as they reached the door. Mr James fumbled with his key and missed the lock the first time. At last the artist inserted the key and unlocked the door. Flinging it open, he rushed into the dark studio.

Lights, Jupiter! There on the wall near the door!

Jupiter found the switch and turned on

the lights.

The studio was empty.

Mr James and Jupiter ran to the cupboard. Pete still sat there on the floor.

His eyes were open, but he seemed in a daze.

Thunderation! The solvent and thinner fumes! Mr James muttered. Get him out, Jupiter.

Together, they helped Pete up. The Second Investigators legs were asleep, and Jupiter and Mr James had to walk him back and forth until circulation

returned. Petes head cleared rapidly in the fresh air of the studio.

Wow, Pete said, I just couldnt stay awake. But I saw it! Something weird, like a ghost!

Look! Jupiter cried.

On the studio floor near the rear window lay one of Joshua Camerons paintings! The window was open.

The ghost did it! Pete shivered, and sat down on the rug-covered bench as if he needed the support of something solid. Then he described how the ghost had floated back and forth with the paintings.

Someone was in here, all right, said Jupiter, but it wasnt any ghost. I

cant accept a ghost that just happens to be interested in Joshua Camerons paintings.

I know I saw a ghost! said Pete stubbornly.

Now, Second, lets be logical. You were half asleep and dazed by those solvent fumes. You saw someone here and just assumed he was a ghost.

Then how did he get in here? asked Mr James. No one but a ghost could have slipped between those window bars, and we didnt see anyone approach the studio

door.

A Locked Room

Ergo, he came in another way, said Jupe. He looked carefully around the studio. Suddenly his eyes gleamed.

There! he exclaimed. Up there!

Pete and Mr James looked where Jupe was pointing, high on the back wall.

There, where the built-in exhaust fan was supposed to be, a small square hole gaped open to the night. The once slack electrical cord now ran tautly from the socket up to the opening and out.

Jupiter walked over to the cord and tugged gently on it. A scraping sound came from the other side of the wall.

Your fan wasn't bolted in securely, Mr James, said Jupe triumphantly.

Our ghost pulled it out and simply let it dangle outside by its cord while he climbed in.

But Jupe! protested Pete. That hole is barely more than a foot square.

Who could get through that?

Someone who is very small or very thin, obviously, answered Jupe.

Mr James shook his head in amazement. I should have known there'd be a logical explanation. I never thought to check the fan bolts.

Neither did I, admitted Jupe ruefully. Jupe hated to make mistakes, and was now annoyed with himself for failing to investigate more thoroughly earlier in the day. He scowled up at the fan opening. Then, gradually, his expression changed to one of puzzlement.

There's only one problem, said Jupe, almost to himself. We answered

Pete's call very quickly in a matter of seconds. I don't see how anyone had time to climb back up through that hole and

escape unseen.

Mr James looked around and shrugged.
Well, theres certainly no one here now!

Yeah, Jupe, agreed Pete.

Jupiter glanced at Pete and then stared!

What is it, Jupe? Pete asked nervously.

I think I know the answer, Jupiter said
quietly. I know where our ghost
is!

Where? Pete cried.

Look down, Jupiter said. Youre sitting

on him!

Pete leaped up as if stung. He stared back at the long, heavy, rug-covered bench he had been sitting on. Jupiters voice was loud as he spoke:

All right, you can come out of that chest now!

There was a silence. Then the rug rose slowly in the air and fell back as the

bench was revealed to be a long chest with a lid that swung up. The boys and Mr James blinked at the scared figure that emerged from the chest.

Skinny Norris! Pete cried.

A Locked Room

The Lost Masterpiece

Skinny Norris sat pale and dejected in the corner of the studio. Pete stood guard over him.

How did you know he was in the chest?
Maxwell James asked Jupiter.

He disarranged the rug when he climbed in, said Jupe. A corner of the chest showed, and I realized that it wasnt a bench, as Id assumed earlier. And, since there was no place else to hide here, I knew the intruder had to be in the chest!

A logical deduction, Mr James said, and turned to Skinny Norris. So, its not enough that you were fired for taking a painting without permission?

You come back and break into my studio, eh? Why?

You shouldnt have fired me, Skinny said defiantly. I brought it back.

That was not the point. You took what did not belong to you, without asking, Mr James thundered. What have you been doing in this studio these last nights? What is your concern with Joshua Camerons paintings?

Wouldnt you all like to know, Skinny

jeered.

You were passing them out the window to someone, and then getting them back, Jupiter said. Who were you passing them to, and what did he want with them?

Im not telling you anything!

Was it De Groot, the art dealer, out there? Pete asked.

I dont know anyone named De Groot, Skinny said.

You refuse to co-operate? Mr James said ominously. Well see, young man. This is not borrowing a painting. This is breaking and entering, a serious crime.

Well see what the police think about it, eh?

P p police? Skinny stammered. No, my dadll kill me! I didnt mean ...

It was Pete who caught a glimpse of the face at the rear window.

Jupe! Pete cried. Someones at the ...

A mued voice rasped, Do not move, any of you! I have a gun! Remain where you are. Norris, hurry!

Neither Jupiter nor Pete recognized the mued voice.

Dont move, boys, Mr James said. He

might shoot.

Behind them, the iron door clanged shut as Skinny escaped. They heard the man at the window run away in the night.

Hes gone! Pete cried.

So is Skinny, Jupiter groaned. Just when we had him!

Never mind, boys, Mr James said. We can find Skinny again. Either hell give me a satisfactory explanation or Ill report him to the police.

The Lost Masterpiece

Well, we found out that Skinny was the intruder, and we know hes in league with someone else, said Jupe, but we dont know who or why. What could that man out there want with old Joshuas paintings?

Skinny passed them out the window one at a time, Pete observed, but the man passed them back. So its not the paintings themselves he wants.

Unless hes been switching the paintings! Stealing the real ones and passing back substitutes!

No, Mr James said, that painting on the floor is one of the real ones. No doubt of it.

Jupiter bent down to study the one painting lying on the floor near the window. He shook his head hopelessly.

If the paintings form some kind of message, a code, I cant ... Mr James!

Jupiter was peering very closely at a corner of the painting. Mr James came over to him.

This corner of the painting appears to be wet! the First Investigator said.

Wet? Mr James echoed. The artist touched the canvas. Why, it is wet!

Someones tampered with it, retouched it!

Why would anyone retouch them? Pete wondered.

Mr James rubbed at the wet corner of the canvas. Well, perhaps someone wanted to see if there was another painting hidden under Joshua Camerons picture. He removed a layer of paint in the corner, then retouched it to hide what hed done.

Jupiter looked as if he had seen a vision. Something under old Joshuas painting? Mr James, may we use the telephone? I have to make a call. Its still not too late!

A half an hour later, Jupiter, Pete, and Mr James were standing out in front of the main house when Professor Carswell

and Hal drove up. Jupe introduced
Mr James to the Carswells.

Whats up, Jupe? Hal wanted to know.

Come on back to Mr Jamess studio, the
First Investigator said.

Inside the studio, Pete and Jupiter had
taken all of Joshua Camerons paintings
out of the rack again. Hal and his dad
saw them as soon as they entered.

Youve found them all! Hal cried.

This is fine work, boys, Professor
Carswell said. Have you told the
Countess yet? Shell be most pleased.

Not yet, sir, Jupiter said. We called you because we have an idea about all that's been going on. We think we know what is so valuable that everyone wants it.

We do? Pete said.

Yes, we do, Jupiter said. Hal, do you remember that gold frame in the adobe? You said there was a painting in it once.

Gold frame? Professor Carswell repeated. I don't recall seeing a painting in a gold frame, Hal.

It was when Mr Cameron first came to the cottage, Dad, Hal explained.

I sort of saw it by accident one day. Old

Joshua said it was an imitation, a print, and he was going to get rid of it. I never saw it again. The frame was empty in the adobe.

Can you describe it, Hal? Jupiter asked.

The Lost Masterpiece

Hal scratched his head. Well, it was a mountain, some horses, what looked like palm trees, and some almost naked people in front of a grass hut. Only the mountain was purple, the horses were blue, the palm trees were yellow, and the people were red!

What! Mr James cried. The artists eyes were very excited. Are you sure the painting looked like that, Hal?

Sure I am. All those crazy colours.

You recognize that painting, sir? Jupiter said quickly.

Wait! Mr James said, and went to rummage among many large books on a shelf. He opened one and flipped the pages. There! Is this the painting you saw, Hal?

Hal looked at the picture in the book. They all did.

It sure is! Hal declared. Exactly!

The Lost Masterpiece

Then what you saw was a print of a very famous painting by a great French painter named Francois Fortunard. A masterpiece, boys, but one that no longer exists. It was destroyed by the Nazis when they occupied France during World

War II. They hated Francois Fortunards work. It was a terrible tragedy for art.

Only Mr James had an odd look on his face this painting was privately owned, and I didnt know any prints had been

made.

I dont think any prints were made, sir, Jupiter said. I think it was never destroyed, and Joshua Cameron had it!

Wow! Pete exclaimed. How much would it be worth?

Any Fortunard would be worth a fortune, Mr James said, but one that had supposedly been destroyed might be worth much, much more. Jupiter, you really think ... ?

Im certain old Joshua had something very valuable that he hid somewhere,

Jupiter said. He used the word master in

his delirious babbling. I think he meant masterpiece

, and that is why someone wants his paintings and thinks something is underneath one of them!

The Fortunard under one of those! Mr James cried, staring at the twenty paintings by the old man. Then lets look!

Wait a minute! said Professor Carswell. How can you look under the cottage paintings without damaging whatever may be underneath?

Its tricky, admitted Mr James. But I have studied restoration techniques and know how to do this safely.

The bearded artist got some solvent, a soft cloth, and some other equipment.

He carefully rubbed off a small spot on a cottage painting. When he found nothing underneath, he retouched the spot and went on to another picture. A

half an hour later he stood up sadly.

Theres nothing hidden under any of these paintings, Jupiter, Mr James said. I guess youre wrong. The Fortunard was destroyed.

Jupiter bit his lip. I was so sure, sir! These paintings have to be the key to something very valuable!

Perhaps, Jupiter, Mr James said, but there must be some other answer.

The paintings are just what they seem to be.

I suppose Hal and I had better take them, then, Professor Carswell said.

We'll return them to the Countess tomorrow, and she will reimburse you, Mr James.

The boys helped load the twenty paintings into Professor Carswells car, and the Professor and Hal drove home.

You boys might as well sleep here, Mr James said. Its too late to take you home

now. Maybe you can think of some other explanation for why those paintings seem valuable. And perhaps Skinny Norris can tell us more, Mr James added grimly. Tomorrow, well find Skinny and make him talk.

A Disappearance!

In the morning, Jupiter had to go home to man the office of the junkyard while

Uncle Titus went off with Hans and Konrad on a sudden buying trip. So only

Pete drove with Mr James to Skinny Norriss house.

I dont see Skinnys car, Mr James, Pete observed.

Perhaps his parents can tell us where he is, the artist said.

It was Mrs Norris who answered their ring. Skinnys mothers face fell as she saw them.

I thought ... Mrs Norris began, and then she looked angrily at Pete.

Have you been doing something to Skinner, Peter Crenshaw! Whenever Skinner becomes involved with you and your ridiculous friend Jupiter Jones, something seems to happen to him! What have you done now?

The boys have done nothing, Mrs Norris, Mr James said bluntly. It is rather the opposite, and if unfortunate things happen to your son when he is involved with Pete and Jupiter, I suspect the fault

lies with Skinner!

Just who are you? Mrs Norris snapped.

My name is Maxwell James, madam.

The artist Skinner was working for?
Why did you fire him so unfairly?

Did your son say I fired him unfairly?
Mr James said. It seems that young
Skinner is given to lying even to you.
The artist told Mrs Norris how he had
fired Skinny for taking a painting without
permission.

Mrs Norris looked unhappy. Skinner
didn't tell me that. I'm sorry, Mr James.

Skinner does seem to have poor judgment at times, and I know that Peter and

Jupiter drive him wild.

Im afraid your son is simply jealous, Mr James said. Now, may we speak to him?

Hes not home, Mr James.

Where is he then? I assure you, it is a serious matter I wish to talk to him about, the artist said.

Skinnys mother suddenly looked miserable. I ... I dont know where Skinner is, Mr James. He ... he didnt come home at all last night!

Hes been out all night? Pete exclaimed.

Yes, Mrs Norris said, her eyes scared now. When you rang, I thought it was Skinner, or someone who knew where he was. His father has already gone to the police.

Mrs Norris, Pete asked, did Skinny tell you anything about what hes been doing after he got fired by Mr James?

Ive tried to think, Skinnys mother said, but all I can remember is that he was working for some man, and that he said something was the key to a

A Disappearance!

fortune. I have no idea what Skinner meant, but Im terribly worried now. If a fortune is involved, anything could have happened to Skinner!

I wouldnt worry, Mrs Norris, Mr James said. Im afraid Skinny got into some trouble with me last night. I think I scared him by mentioning the police, and he probably has simply hidden somewhere to avoid being caught.

I hope so, Mr James, Skinnys mother said, but I cant help worrying. A

man in a blue car has been loitering around here. Skinner was seen talking to

the man, and we discovered that our telephone has been tapped. Im so afraid that Skinner has been kidnapped!

Bob showed up at the junkyard just as Uncle Titus returned from his buying trip. Jupiter was now free for a while, and the two boys retired to Headquarters to puzzle over their case.

Jupiter quickly related the events of the night at Mr Jamess studio. Bob listened eagerly. He was as disappointed as the other boys had been when he learned that nothing had been found under the twenty paintings.

Then Joshua didnt have the valuable Fortunard? Bob said sadly. It was

destroyed by the Nazis. Joshua had a print.

No, I believe Joshua did have the Fortunard, and hid it, Jupiter said stubbornly. When he used the word master in his babbling, Im convinced he was trying to say masterpiece

. Hal stumbled on it, and Joshua pretended it was a print. Then Joshua hid the painting so no one else would see it. When he got sick, he tried to leave a message telling where it was. A disguised message, so

Hal and his dad wouldnt know what he was really saying.

Jupiter took out the sheet of paper with Joshua Camerons last words on it, and spread it on the table. Now, zig when zag and wrong way could be directions. However, the second time Joshua used the word wrong

, he used it alone. Maybe its not a direction. Maybe its telling us to look for something wrong. Something that ought to be different than it is.

You mean something done the wrong way? Bob asked. Maybe something that zigs when it ought to zag? Looks wrong?

Exactly, Records, Jupiter said. Im sure that master means masterpiece

, and the fact that old Joshua kept saying my paintings, my canvas

, and canvas must mean that his own paintings are a key to the message. There is something about his paintings that should tell us where the masterpiece is!

But what, Jupe? Bob stared at the words on the paper. You and Pete looked at those paintings pretty closely.

Jupiter shook his head unhappily. I admit Im stumped at the moment.

But we still have a clue to work with the way the cottage seems to shrink in those paintings. Why did old Joshua paint the houses smaller and smaller,

while leaving everything else in the pictures the same size?

Bob thought. Maybe he was trying to tell us to get the cottage out of the picture, Jupe? Maybe its hidden under the cottage?

Well ... Jupiter said slowly. Thats possible. But, then, youd think he would omit the cottage entirely in the last painting.

How about in one of the trees? In something that stays the same in all the pictures? Maybe if we look, well find just one thing thats always the same!

That could be, too, Records. I want to

take a closer look at those paintings after
Pete and Mr James get back from talking
to Skinny Norris. Maybe Skinny

A Disappearance!

will tell them the answer anyway.

Gosh, you think he will, First?

Perhaps, but Im not optimistic, Bob. I doubt that whoever hired Skinny would tell him much.

I sure wouldnt, Bob agreed.

Meanwhile, Jupiter went on, something else puzzles me a lot.

Whats that, Jupe?

Do you remember Hal telling us that old Joshua once said that he was the most expensive painter in the world, but that no one knew it? Hal said Joshua laughed after saying that. Why did he laugh, and what did he mean?

Maybe Joshua meant that his paintings are expensive because they're a key to the valuable masterpiece by Fortunard.

I thought of that, Jupiter replied, but it sounds to me as if Joshua was speaking more generally as if his own paintings were expensive but unknown.

Well, Mr James said Joshua was technically very good, and De Groot seems to think the paintings are good.

But Mr James also said Joshua had no style of his own, so his work isnt good and an art dealer should know that. I think De Groot is fooling us. I

dont think De Groot is an art dealer at all!

Gosh, what is he, then, Juve? A gang member?

Im not sure, Jupiter admitted, but Im convinced that De Groot knows that Joshua had the famous Fortunard, and wants it!

You think its De Groot old Joshua tried to leave a message for? Bob wondered.

Could be, Records, Jupiter said. I think ...

They both heard the scrambling down in Tunnel Two. The trap door opened and Pete climbed up. The tall Second Investigator was grim and serious as he looked at his friends.

Skinneys disappeared, fellows! His mother thinks maybe hes been kidnapped!

Kidnapped! Bob cried.

By whom, Pete? Jupiter asked quickly.

The Norrises dont know, First. But Skinneys mother says she saw the blue

coup' e hanging around, and Skinny talking to the man in it.

De Groot! Bob said fiercely.

Mrs Norris says their telephone was tapped, too, Pete added. That must have been what De Groot was doing the day we saw him, Jupe. The day he caught us.

Yes, Jupiter agreed. Does Mrs Norris know what Skinny was doing, or who he was working with?

No, First, Pete said. Except that Skinny was working for some man, and

Skinny said that something was the key to a fortune!

Jupiter thought hard. Fellows, Skinmys job was to pass those paintings out the studio window to whoever he was working for. That proves that those paintings really are the key to everything! And his kidnapping could mean only one thing that Skinny knows too much, and someone wants to keep him silent. Someone named De Groot, Ill bet!

Poor Skinny, Bob said. He sure can get into trouble.

A Disappearance!

Yes, Jupiter said, and if we want to get him out of trouble, we have to solve the message of old Joshuas paintings quickly! Lets go to Remuda

Canyon!

Trapped!

As the boys hiked out to Professor Carswells house, Pete told the others that

Mr James had gone to the police to report the incident at his studio the night before.

Mr Norris was already with the police about Skinny being missing, Pete added.

Theyll be looking for De Groots blue coup' e, Jupiter said. But if we can solve the riddle of the last words and the

paintings, I think well find De Groot faster.

You think De Groot has solved the message? Bob asked.

I think he must be at least close to it. Thats why hes probably holding

Skinny, Jupiter said. To keep Skinny from talking to anyone before he gets the masterpiece.

When they arrived at the big frame house in the canyon, the boys saw Hal standing on the porch of the cottage. Hal ran to meet them. He was agitated.

Someone was out here again this

morning! Hal cried when he reached the investigators. He tore up the whole cottage.

Were the twenty paintings in the cottage? Jupiter asked.

No. They were in our house. We tried to call the Countess and Mr Marechal this morning, but they were out, Hal explained. Dad drove over to their motel to talk to the Countess in person, to tell her that we had the paintings but that someone is still searching.

Did you see anyone around this morning? Jupiter asked.

Yes, we did, Hal said. Over near the

garage. Just a glimpse, but it was a man. He ran off towards the gorge again, and thats when we found the cottage ransacked.

Lets look around the garage, Pete said.

Maybe he dropped something, Bob added.

They all went to the garage behind the big house and spread out to search the ground. They found nothing. Dejected, they gathered outside the garage.

There certainly arent any signs of him, Bob said.

No, Jupiter said. Not even any

footprints. Lets go to the cottage. I
want to see ...

The strange noise reached them thinly in the late morning sun. They all looked at each other. It was an odd sound, like the strangled groaning of some small animal.

Wh What is it, fellows? Hal stammered.

Shhhh! Jupiter said softly.

The strangled noise was faint and yet close. It sounded as if someone were trying to talk with his face pressed against the ground. An indistinct mumble.

Trapped!

Then something banged inside the garage.

Its the garage! Pete cried.

Someones in there! Bob exclaimed.

Pete ran up to the main door of the garage and tried to tug it open. It did not budge.

That door is stuck shut, called Hal.
Cmon, we can get in the side door.

He darted around the corner of the

garage and stopped in surprise. Hey! he exclaimed. He stared in puzzlement at the small side door, which was secured by a padlock.

Whats the matter, Hal? asked Bob.

We never lock that door unless were going to be away a long time. Now how did ...

The Professors son took out a small key ring, found the right key, and hastily unlocked the side door. Bursting inside the garage, the boys looked all around. The garage seemed empty, except for some tools and old timber that were scattered around.

Something moved in a corner! Someone was lying tied and gagged on the floor, his eyes rolling. Grunting sounds came from him as he tried to talk through the gag.

Its Skinny! Bob said.

They untied the youth.

What happened, Skinny? Pete demanded.

Skinny Norris sat up. His face was pale and his eyes were scared. He rubbed at his wrists where the ropes had cut into him. He shivered.

I never thought Id be glad to see you three, Skinny said shakily. Gosh, Im

sorry Ive been trying to make trouble for you.

Ill bet, muttered Pete. He knew that Skinny was scared and shaken now, but had little faith that the youth would be grateful once the scare had been forgotten.

Skinny, tell us what happened to you! said Jupe impatiently.

Where have you been all night? Bob demanded.

Well, Skinny said nervously, after I got away from you guys, we came out here. When we got here, he tied me up out at the back somewhere! I almost fell into

that gorge. You cant see it in the dark unless you know its there. He laughed at me and said everyone fell into the gorge once before they knew it was there.

Jupiter stared at the tall youth. Everyone falls in once, yes, he said slowly.

Early this morning, he locked me in this garage. Ive been here ever since.

I was afraid to make any noise he might have still been around. But then I

heard your voices, so I tried to yell.

Lucky for you! Pete exclaimed.

Bob said, Jupe? What are you thinking

about?

The stout leader of the trio was still staring at Skinny as if he saw something amazing on the youths face. His voice seemed to tremble when he finally spoke:

Skinny, who was it that ...

The side door slammed closed with a loud bang that made the boys jump in alarm. They heard the padlock snap shut. They were locked in the darkness of the windowless garage!

Hey! Hal called out. Were in here!

There was no answer.

Trapped!

Quick! Jupiter said urgently. Look out through those cracks around the doors, and through those knotholes!

Pete and Bob each peered out one side of the big front garage door. Jupiter found a knothole in the rear wall. Hal looked through a crack around the side door frame.

I see someone! Hal hissed.

The Three Investigators joined him at the side door and peeked out into the late

morning sun.

Its De Groot! Pete whispered.

The short, heavy Dutchman stood staring at the garage, frowning. As the boys watched, he looked all around as if searching for something or someone.

You let us out of here, De Groot! Hal shouted.

We know what youre after! Bob added hotly.

De Groot scowled towards the garage. Youre all safer in there. Now be quiet! I ...

The Dutchman turned sharply to look towards the big house, then trotted quickly out of sight into the thick brushwood behind the garage.

For a long minute nothing moved out there in the sun.

Then the boys heard someone coming, and Mr Marechal came into sight outside the garage.

Mr Marechal! Pete called out. De Groots out there, be careful!

The silver-haired estate manager stared at the garage.

He went into the brush at the back! Bob

shouted.

Mr Marechal turned and scanned the undergrowth.

He locked us in here. Get us out, sir! Hal cried.

Mr Marechal walked closer. Is De Groot alone, boys?

Yes, sir, Pete called. Skinny Norris is in here with us!

Norris? Mr Marechal said. I see. Watch that Norris closely, boys. I

dont trust him. Hell fool you all if he can!

The silver-haired little man tried the side door. Its padlocked out here.

What about the main garage door?

Its stuck shut, sir, Hal explained. But Ive got the key to the side door.

Ill slide it out.

Hey, Jupiter! began Skinny.

Shut up, Skinny! hissed Jupe.

Hal took the key off his key ring, bent to slide it under the side door and bumped hard into Jupiter. Hal lost his balance and fell over. There was a sharp metallic sound.

The key! Hal cried. I lost it. Look on the floor!

Mr Marechal called out, What happened, boys?

I dropped the key! Hal answered. Its dark in here. Were trying to find it on the floor.

Hurry, boys, Mr Marechal urged from outside.

Pete, Bob, and Hal crawled over the dark concrete floor. Skinny still sat in his corner, his scared eyes almost luminous in the dark garage. Jupiter had not moved since he had bumped into Hal.

I cant find it, Pete groaned.

Neither can I, Bob said.

Where could it be? Hal moaned, feeling on the floor.

Jupiter said suddenly, I hear a car coming, fellows.

Trapped!

The other boys all ran to peer out all except Skinny, who still sat in the corner. In the sun, Mr Marechal looked towards the front. The boys heard a car stopping in the driveway to Professor Carswells house. Then the little manager began to run back towards the brushwood. He disappeared into the brush, headed straight for the gorge.

He must have seen De Groot! Hal said.

Oh, no! Pete cried. Look, fellows!

They saw De Groot suddenly reappear at the edge of the brush, and run off in the same direction as Mr Marechal.

The dark Dutchman had a gun!

A Criminal Unmasked

Helplessly, the boys watched through the cracks and knotholes of the garage walls. De Groot and Mr Marechal had both disappeared. A few seconds later, Professor Carswell and the Countess came into view from the direction of the house.

Dad! Hal shouted.

Professor Carswell whirled about. Hal?
Where are you?

In the garage, Dad! Were locked in!

Professor Carswell and the Countess hurried to the garage. The Professor unlocked the side door with his own key, and came into the garage. The boys crowded around Hals dad and the Countess.

How in heaven did you get locked in, boys? Professor Carswell said.

That De Groot locked us in, Pete explained. Mr Marechal would have let us out, but Hal dropped the key, and we couldnt find it. Now De Groots chasing Mr Marechal with a gun!

Armand was here? the Countess said. And that De Groot?

Jupiter suddenly said in an odd voice,
You didnt know Mr Marechal would be
here, Countess? Youre surprised?

Yes, I am surprised, the Countess said.
You see, as I just informed Professor
Carswell, Mr Marechal hasnt been at
our motel since yesterday evening.

He was gone all night. I dont know
where or why. He told me nothing about
leaving.

Professor Carswell said, The Countess
says that she saw De Groots blue coup'
e at her motel early last night, too.

Now De Groots after him with a gun!
Pete cried.

Hal said, If we hadnt lost the key, and if Mr Marechal had let us out, maybe De Groot wouldnt have dared come out of hiding. We have to help

Mr Marechal!

No, we dont, Jupiter said. We dont have to help Mr Marechal, and we didnt lose the key.

The stocky leader of the Investigators moved his foot. He bent and picked up the key he had been standing on the whole time! Everyone stared at him as he held up the key to the garage.

Jupe! Bob said, mystified. Why did you ... ?

You were standing on the key all the time? Pete said.

Jupiter turned to Skinny Norris in the corner. You're quite safe now, Skinny. You can tell us who kidnapped you and locked you up here. Who you've been working for.

He's been working with De Groot, of course! Hal said.

No, he hasn't, said Jupiter.

A Criminal Unmasked

Skinny licked his lips nervously. You're

right, Jupiter. It was Mr Marechal.

He came to me that day after Id brought Mr Jamess painting to your junkyard.

He hired me to pass Mr Jamess paintings out that studio window so he could see if anything was hidden under the old mans paintings. I was mad at Mr James for firing, me, so I helped.

You were working for Mr Marechal all along? Bob said, amazed.

I told you none of you knew what was going on, Skinny said, with some of his old nasty sneer returning now that he was safe.

Yes, I should have realized what you meant then, Jupiter acknowledged.

Marechal wasnt going to let us out of the garage, fellows. He was probably planning to tie us all up with Skinny! Or worse! Thats why I stepped on the key. We were safer locked away from Marechal.

Pete shuddered. Gosh, Mr Marechal sure fooled me.

And me, the Countess said. Are you sure of this, Jupiter?

I am, Countess.

Jupiter nodded firmly.

Skinny's story proves that

Marechal is a dangerous character. And once you know that, a lot of puzzling details start to make sense. For instance, the police have not yet appeared in this case. Marechal said he was going to call the police when he fired us. But he didn't call them, did he?

No, I suppose he never did, the Countess agreed.

Of course not, said Jupiter. The police would have jeopardised his plans.

He didn't fire us because of the danger. He wanted to get us out of his way! He had Skinny, so he didn't want us around.

And now we know why Skinny was at your motel yesterday morning,

Jupiter went on. He was merely looking for Marechal. He ran off to avoid talking to us. But we misinterpreted his actions and thought he was trying to break in and then flee.

See, youre not so smart after all, jeered Skinny.

Jupiter ignored him and continued. I dont suppose, Countess, that Mr Marechal ever went to talk to the woman who bought Joshuas statue of Venus and wouldnt sell it back?

Not that I know of, Jupiter, replied the

Countess.

I thought not, said Jupe. He was always more interested in the missing paintings than in your family heirlooms. And once he heard Hal repeat Joshuas last words, he knew the paintings were the key.

Key, Jupiter? The Countess frowned. Key to what?

To where old Joshua hid a lost masterpiece by Francois Fortunard, Countess. A supposedly destroyed painting that Mr James says would be worth a large fortune.

But, Jupiter, Professor Carswell objected, how would Marechal have

known that old Joshua had the masterpiece? The Countess doesn't know.

Surely she would know more about her own brother than Marechal could have.

No, sir, Jupiter said firmly. I am afraid that Marechal has been deceiving the Countess. You see, I made some other deductions while we were locked in the garage. I am now quite sure that it wasn't De Groot who shut us up in the adobe two days ago, and searched it so frantically. And De Groot wasn't the mysterious intruder that very first day, when Uncle Titus bought Joshua's things from you. It was Marechal! He knew about the masterpiece all the time.

He came here secretly, before he came with the Countess, to try to get it.

How would he have known what Joshua had? the Countess demanded.

A Criminal Unmasked

He always knew, Countess, Jupiter said.
You recall Hal told us that old

Joshua babbled about tell them and tell
em

? Well, he wasnt really saying either. He
was actually saying tell M.

You see?

M.

Tell

Marechal

! Because

Marechal was old Joshuas partner!

Partner? the Countess said. Partner in what? Some criminal endeavour, you mean?

I think so, Countess. Something criminal involving the lost Fortunard masterpiece. Im not sure yet exactly what they were up to, but Im sure it was something nefarious.

I am shocked, Jupiter! the Countess said. We must call the police to apprehend Armand, then, before he can do more!

And dont forget that De Groot could still be around, added Bob. Hes involved somehow.

Ill go and call the police at once, Professor Carswell said. Skinny, you come with me.

Well come along, too, Jupe said. I want to see the paintings again. We must solve the riddle of where the masterpiece is hidden before Marechal or De

Groot does, or the police could be too late!

A Criminal Unmasked

A Zig for a Zag

Everyone hurried into the big house. Professor Carswell and Skinny disappeared down the hall to call the police. The other boys and the Countess went into the living-room, where the twenty paintings were lined up around the walls.

I set them up in order, Jupiter, Hal pointed out. Number one is on the left, and number twenty all the way to the right.

They all stared at the twenty paintings of

the cottage. Each one done in its different style, and each one with everything the same size except the cottage itself. The Countess, who had never seen them before, blinked in confusion.

Why, the elegant lady said, it looks like the house is shrinking! Quite a remarkable effect. Amazing, really!

Yes, Jupiter mused. It seems that Joshua was a very skilled painter. I

expect that such an effect isnt easy.

But what does it tell us, Jupe? Pete demanded.

Well, the stocky leader of the trio said, Bob suggested that perhaps something in all the pictures remains exactly the same. Such as a tree. Can anyone see something?

They all peered at the row of paintings. One by one, they shook their heads. Everything except the cottage with its gaily striped, patched awning remained the same size, but nothing remained exactly the same in shape, colour, or position.

Only Hal had an idea. Its sort of like a microscope, or telescope, you know? he said, staring at the paintings of the shrinking house. I mean, as if we were focusing down through some kind of

instrument on to the house.

Focusing? Jupiter said slowly.

I see what Hal means, Bob said. Sort of fixing our attention on the cottage.

Telling us that the only important part of the paintings is the cottage itself.

Jupiters eyes suddenly began to widen. He blinked rapidly at the series of paintings, and quickly took the piece of paper with Joshua Camerons last words on it from his pocket. He studied the paper, his eyes bright with excitement.

Tell M.

, he read. That means tell Marechal, I'm sure.

My paintings and master mean that the clue to the hiding-place of the masterpiece is in his twenty paintings.

Zig when zag and wrong way mean, I think, that we are to find something that is wrong that should zig, but that zags instead!

Jupiter put down the paper. So far, Joshua's message adds up to this: Tell

Marechal that the key to the masterpiece is in my paintings, in something that zigs when it should zag! He looked at them all in triumph. And that leaves just one

word of Joshuas that we havent
accounted for yet!

A Zig for a Zag

They were all silent, mystified. Then
Pete leaned over and looked at the paper
with the words on it.

My canvas

, he read. Or just canvas

. Hal wasnt sure. But what does that tell
us, Jupe?

Look at the twenty paintings! Jupiter said.

They all looked.

On the house! On the shrinking cottage itself! Jupiter urged. The house is so small in the last painting that almost all we can focus on is ...

The porch awning! Bob cried.

A striped awning! Hal said.

A canvas awning! Pete exclaimed.

With patches on it, fellows, Jupiter finished, And one of the patches has the stripes going the wrong way!

Stripes that zig, Bob said with awe,
when they are supposed to zag!

To the cottage, men! Jupiter said.

The boys all ran out of the house and
across the lawn to the cottage. The

Countess was right behind them. Jupiter
looked up at a large patch that was just
about the size of old Joshua Camerons
paintings a canvas patch that had been
put on with the awning stripes going the
wrong way!

Pete and Hal brought a ladder from the
garage. Pete climbed up, took out his
pocket knife, and carefully cut the heavy
stitching that held the awning patch in

place. The patch came off in one large piece. Pete dropped it down to

Jupiter, who absent-mindedly rolled it up while he stared up at the awning.

Under the patch, where there should have been nothing, or at least only an area of damaged awning, there was another patch of plain canvas. Carefully, gently, Pete cut the four small stitches that held the plain-looking patch. It came off, revealing a perfectly undamaged area of the original awning.

There wasnt any need for a patch here at all, Pete said.

Bring it down and turn it over! Jupiter

said.

Pete climbed down and turned over the plain piece of canvas. They all gaped at the dazzling sight. The gorgeous colours seemed to glow in the sunlight. They looked at the great purple mountain, the blue horses, the yellow palm trees, and the red people. They had the lost masterpiece of Francois Fortunard!

Bring it inside, Jupiter said.

Pete and Bob carried it gingerly inside the cottage. The Countess touched the painting almost reverently as the boys laid it on a table.

It must be worth a kings ransom, boys,

the elegant lady said. How on earth did my poor brother get it?

Well, maam ... Jupiter began.

Professor Carswell came in with Skinny. The police are on their way. I

spoke to Chief Reynolds, and ... you found it! Where was it?

The boys quickly explained Jupiters solution.

Fine work, Jupiter! the Professor said. Who would have thought to look under a patch in an old awning full of patches? A perfect hiding-place

waterproof, safe, and close to old Joshua all the time, eh? However, I suggest you roll it up now, and handle it carefully. It could be easily damaged now that its out in the open.

As the others watched, Bob and Pete carefully rolled the masterpiece for safe keeping and gave it to Jupiter. Skinny looked on sourly.

A Zig for a Zag

Well, Countess, Professor Carswell said, smiling, unless it turns out to be stolen, I suppose it belongs to you. A fortune!

Stolen? the Countess said. You think Joshua stole it?

No, Jupiter said. I dont think it is stolen, but

A long shadow suddenly filled the small living-room. A thin shadow with a gun! A voice chuckled:

But now I will steal it!

Mr Marechal stood in the doorway with an ugly pistol aimed at them all.

The Countess glared at the silver-haired man.

You're a despicable thief! You won't get away with this!

Yes, I will, Mr Marechal smiled nastily. Don't try to stop me, my dear

Countess. I won't hesitate to use this pistol!

The little man looked greedily at the rolled canvas in Jupiter's hand. I

congratulate you, Jupiter. You beat me to the solution of old Joshuas puzzle.

Luckily, I have been watching you closely. Now ...

Mr Marechal cocked his head. They all heard the distant sirens coming towards the canyon, Mr Marechal waved his pistol.

No more talk! Give it to me. Quickly!

Jupiter hesitated, clutching the canvas.

I warn you! Mr Marechal cried, aiming the pistol.

Give it to him, Jupiter, Professor

Carswell said.

Hurry! Mr Marechal snarled.

Jupiter gulped, and held out the rolled canvas. Mr Marechal grabbed it, waved his gun in warning, and ran out the door. As soon as he was gone, they all rushed to the windows.

Stop him! the Countess cried.

No, Professor Carswell said, its too dangerous. Let him go.

In despair, they watched Mr Marechal run across the lawn and disappear behind some shrubbery along the road. A moment later the yellow Mercedes raced

away down the canyon. The sirens of the police came closer.

The police will stop him! Professor Carswell said.

No. Jupiter shook his head. Theyre looking for a blue coup' e, not a yellow Mercedes.

As usual, Jupiter was right. When the police arrived a minute later, the yellow Mercedes was not with them.

A Zig for a Zag

Jupiter Reveals the Truth

They all rushed out of the cottage to meet Chief Reynolds and his men. Professor Carswell quickly explained all that had happened. The Chief was upset.

Why, we passed that yellow Mercedes, the Chief exclaimed.

You must go after Marechal at once! the Countess insisted. Hes a criminal! Hell escape with the masterpiece!

No, he wont, Jupiter said, and grinned at them all. Luckily, you used your sirens,

Chief Reynolds. They scared him so much, he never even looked at the canvas he grabbed from me.

Jupiter held up a second rolled canvas!

This is the lost Fortunard, the First Investigator said with a triumphant laugh. Marechal is escaping with nothing but a roll of awning canvas! I

switched them on him!

Jupiter unrolled the canvas he held, and revealed the dazzling masterpiece.

For a moment, everyone blinked at Jupiter and the magnificent painting.

Then they all began to laugh. Chief Reynolds patted Jupiter on the back.

Very good, Jupiter, the Chief beamed. Marechal should have been more careful in dealing with you. He didnt realize your resourcefulness as we do, eh? The Chief laughed, and told one of his men to radio in an alert for the yellow Mercedes.

We beat him, Jupe! Bob and Pete exclaimed together.

Not yet, fellows, Jupiter pointed out. We have saved the lost Fortunard from him, but he must still be apprehended.

We'll get him easily now, Jupiter, Chief

Reynolds said confidently. If he had the painting, capturing him would be complicated. He might threaten to destroy the painting, or we might accidentally damage it. But now he won't get far not with a roll of awning canvas!

There is still that De Groot to find, Professor Carswell remembered.

They are probably partners in this affair.

Sure they are, Pete agreed. We better still keep an eye on that masterpiece!

Well, the Countess said, smiling at the boys, you young men have certainly proven yourselves to me. I do not think De Groot will get my masterpiece now. I

intend to see that you boys are handsomely rewarded.

Bob and Pete blushed with pleasure at the elegant ladys praise. But Jupiter seemed to be thinking about something. The First Investigator was staring at the masterpiece.

Chief? Professor Carswell said. Just whom does the painting belong to now? It would seem to be the Countesss, unless old Joshua stole it from somewhere. He did seem to think he had to hide it.

Jupiter Reveals the Truth

Im sure my poor brother didnt steal it. Poor Joshua was quite eccentric, but he wasnt a thief.

No, Jupiter said suddenly, I dont think the painting was stolen from anyone.

Then I plan to present it to some fine museum, the Countess said. Such a work of genius belongs to all the world.

Well have to investigate it, of course, Chief Reynolds said. Well hold it until then. But if Jupiter is right, and it isnt stolen, Im sure any museum will be grateful to you, Countess. Now

Look! the Countess suddenly cried out. At the garage back there! Its

De Groot!

They all whirled. There was no one at the garage.

I saw him! De Groot! the Countess insisted. He was at the corner of the

Jupiter Reveals the Truth garage with a pistol! He ran back when I called out!

He wont get away! Chief Reynolds said grimly. My men and I will go left around the house. Professor, you and the boys go to the right. If you see

De Groot, try to drive him towards us. Take young Norris with you Ill deal with him later. Countess, you watch the masterpiece.

The boys followed the Professor towards the garage. Skinny Norris went reluctantly, as if afraid of De Groot. But

they saw no trace of the Dutchman.

At the far side of the garage, they met Chief Reynolds and his men.

Any sign of him? the Chief asked.

No, Professor Carswell said. What could he hope to do with you and your men around?

I dont know, the Chief said. Its easy to hide around here. I think we

Chief! Jupiter exclaimed all at once. Wed better go back to the cottage!

Quickly!

What, Jupiter? Chief Reynolds said.
Why?

Hurry, sir!

Jupiter led them all back to the front of the big house. It was Bob who saw the figures running in the driveway.

Look! Its De Groot!

And the Countess! Hal pointed. De Groots chasing her!

Shes got the painting! Pete said.

De Groot fooled us, Professor Carswell cried. He circled around to steal the painting, and the Countess ran with it!

Shes trying to reach my car!

The police had their guns out. The Countess had almost reached Professor Carswells car, with De Groot close behind her. Chief Reynolds fired a warning shot into the air. De Groot and the Countess stopped. The police, Professor Carswell, and the boys ran up to the pair.

Now weve got you, De Groot! Bob crowed.

Thank goodness! the Countess said. He tried to grab the masterpiece, so I ran with it! Arrest him, Chief!

Yes, Chief Reynolds said. Youre under

arrest, Mr De Groot. You have the right

No, Jupiter said. Not De Groot. Arrest the Countess!

For a moment, they were all struck dumb.

That is a poor joke, Jupiter, the Countess said.

Jupiter shook his head, Its not a joke, Countess. You were trying to escape with the painting. You knew that if the painting was investigated, you would never get it. In fact, you might even go to prison! De Groot was trying to stop you!

Nonsense, the elegant lady said. Its my

painting!

Yes, it is, Jupiter agreed. Because it was Joshuas, and Joshua really had two partners Marechal and you.

So? the dark-eyed De Groot said. You know, do you? It seems I made a mistake. I should have worked with you boys instead of trying to keep you out.

I underestimated you.

Jupiter, what are you talking about? Chief Reynolds demanded. Who is De Groot?

I presume he is some kind of Dutch policeman, Jupiter said. He has been

pursuing Marechal and the Countess.

Jupiter Reveals the Truth

De Groot nodded. The boy is quite right, Chief. I am a private detective from Amsterdam. I have been after Joshua Cameron and his confederates for many years. I knew of his masterpiece, and when I heard he had died here in

Rocky Beach, I hurried here to prevent Marechal or the Countess from getting it.

They were both Joshuas partners in crime, Jupiter continued. Mr Marechal tried to double-cross the Countess. When we defeated him, the Countess

tried to get the painting by pretending to see De Groot and making us chase him.

Alone, she tried to escape with it to Professor Carswells car. But De Groot really was watching, and pursued her.

Exactly, De Groot said. Now she will go to prison!

Then the Fortunard is actually stolen?
the Chief said.

No, sir, it isnt stolen, Jupiter said. In fact, it doesnt exist it was destroyed by the Nazis, as Mr James said.

But ... Chief Reynolds began.

Jupiter! Bob exclaimed. We all can see ...

Jupiter smiled grimly. You remember that old Joshua once told Hal that he was the most expensive painter in the world, but that no one knew it? Well, he was!

Ah, De Groot said in admiration. So you know it all, young man? You are a most intelligent detective.

Know what, Jupe? Pete cried.

That old Joshua Cameron was, indeed, a great painter. He was a master painter of forgeries! The valuable Fortunard is a complete forgery, a fake, and that is why Marechal and the Countess wanted it so

that they could sell it to some victim.

But, Chief Reynolds said, De Groot just said that he came here because he knew old Joshua had a masterpiece.

Joshua did, Chief, Jupiter said. His own last masterpiece. A masterpiece of forgery!

Alfred Hitchcock Misses a

Clue

Confound it! Alfred Hitchcock said over the telephone. Must I spend my existence introducing juvenile investigators?

Bob pleaded into the phone, Just read our report, sir. This is one of

Jupiters most brilliant cases. Youll learn a lot!

The great director was ominously silent. Are you suggesting, Bob Andrews, that

Jupiter Jones is more intelligent than I?

Oh no, sir, Bob said hastily. You could be a fine detective, Im sure, if ...

er, I mean ...

Thunderation! There was another icy silence. Very well, Bob Andrews, bring your report to my office. I shall read it, and I will introduce this case again on one condition.

What is that, sir? Bob asked uneasily.

That there is one deduction I am unable to make, using the same evidence that the insufferable Jupiter had!

Bob gulped. I guess thats okay, sir.

Then present yourselves at my office tomorrow!

The next day, Bob, Pete and Jupiter sat in Mr Hitchcocks office. The director looked up from the Investigators report and smiled at them smugly.

So, the rough Mr De Groot is a detective, while the suave Mr Marechal and the elegant Countess prove to be criminals! Ah, how simple it would be if only we could look at people and know what they were! Has Mr Marechal been apprehended as yet?

Yes, sir, Pete said, and he and the

Countess are telling everything about each other! They made a fortune for years, selling old Joshuas forged paintings to dupes in Europe. A year ago they were sent to jail for a short time. Old

Joshua escaped the police and fled to America with his last masterpiece. So

Stop! Mr Hitchcock cried. I will now exhibit my own deductions. Being in prison, they could not act on Professor Carswells letter relating Joshuas death until their release. Marechal was released a week before the Countess, and came to Rocky Beach at once. He intended to double-cross the Countess by getting the forged masterpiece first. But

he failed to locate it, injured his leg in the gorge, and so returned to Europe to recover and rejoined the Countess.

Those were my conclusions, Jupiter agreed.

De Groot learned of Joshuas death, and followed the pair here. As soon as he realized Marechal was interested in Skinny Norris, he assumed that the con man would try to sell the master forgery to the Norrises. Therefore he tapped

Alfred Hitchcock Misses a Clue their phone, hoping that he could follow Marechals progress and catch him in the

act.

Jupiter nodded.

Mr Hitchcock beamed confidently. Old Joshua had hidden his masterpiece of forgery, to keep it from prying eyes such as young Hals. Then he had to devise some means of letting his confederates know where the masterpiece was, in case anything happened to him. I presume that he did not dare to write to them about it. So he painted twenty numbered pictures of a shrinking house. Then, ironically, he betrayed his secret to others by babbling a message to Marechal before his death.

As soon as Marechal learned of the

existence of the paintings, he knew they would lead him to the master forgery. Old Joshuas last words confirmed that they were the key though Marechal never quite understood the whole message. After Skinny appeared with the one painting, Marechal contacted him.

Skinny, having been fired, foolishly fell in with the plot to pass the paintings out the window of Mr Jamess studio so that Marechal could examine them.

Marechal thought the forgery might be under one of the paintings, just as

I did, Jupiter said.

A natural conclusion, if erroneous, Mr

Hitchcock said. But Marechal continued to search as well, and it was he who locked you in the adobe. Then

Skinny was caught in the studio, and Marechal had to abduct him to save himself. Luckily, when you were in the garage, you guessed Marechal was a villain in time to prevent his capturing all of you if not doing worse! De

Groot, of course, had locked you all in the garage for your safety! Incidentally, I presume that De Groots limp, which led you astray, is some old injury?

Yes, sir, Bob said, hes had it for years.

Mr Hitchcock nodded. Finding the

masterpiece was excellent reasoning, but you have explained that in your report. Then, Jupiter, you deduced that old Joshua and Marechal were art forgers. What you did not know at that point was the Countess's role. You became suspicious of the Countess when she claimed to have seen Mr De Groot by the garage. As far as you knew, the

Countess had never met him while she was in Rocky Beach. Obviously she had run into him before. Since De Groot had been following Marechal from the beginning, and since he had done nothing after all except try to scare you away from Marechal, it was probable that he was some sort of policeman. When he

chased the Countess at the finish, it became clear that she, too, must have been a confederate of old Joshuas, and was trying to grab the fake Fortunard!

Jupiter sighed. That is how I reasoned, yes.

But, Pete said eagerly, how did Jupe guess that old Joshua was a forger at all, Mr Hitchcock?

Why, that is quite clear, Peter. There was, of course, old Joshuas hint to Hal about being expensive but no one knowing it. Plus Mr James telling you that old Joshua was a fine painter who had imitated twenty different styles.

Who could paint so well, in so many styles, and remain totally unknown? A master forger!

Thats just how I figured it out, sir, Jupiter agreed.

Which ends the case, the famous director beamed, and, since I have understood all, I am relieved of an introduction!

Bob was glum. I guess so, sir.

Alfred Hitchcock Misses a Clue

Excellent, Mr Hitchcock declared. Then may I inquire as to the ultimate fate of the principal characters in this case?

Well, answered Jupiter, Marechal has already been charged with abduct—

ing Skinny Norris, and will certainly go to jail here for it. The Countess is not involved in that charge, but the police are holding her in custody until the

European officials decide what to do about her put her in jail for her past

crimes, probably. De Groot has gone back to Amsterdam. His client, you know, was a wealthy former victim of the forgery gang who wanted them broken up for good. The man was not at all satisfied when the Countess and Marechal went to jail for only a year and Joshua Cameron escaped. He should be happy now.

Mr Hitchcock nodded. And what will be the disposition of the forged masterpiece?

Technically, it does belong to the Countess, said Jupe. But its worthless to her now. Since she cant do business with it, she doesnt want it. She has given it to Professor Carswell in payment of

Joshuas debts. It will bring much more than that. A collector of forgeries has already offered a large sum. With the money, Professor Carswell and Hal will restore their fine old house and the adobe.

People are already trying to buy old Joshuas twenty paintings, Bob said.

Mr James has them back now.

And what of Skinny Norris?

Skinny was just stupid, as usual, Jupiter said. The police wont charge him, but his parents have sent him back to school for the summer.

Good, Mr Hitchcock said. Now, I am busy, and if

Er, Mr Hitchcock, Pete said suddenly. I think theres one deduction you havent explained how Jupe knew, when De Groot locked us in the garage and looked guilty, that it was really Mr Marechal who was guilty? That was the real turning point.

What? Why ...

Skinny had been too scared to tell us yet, Bob pointed out quickly. He might never have talked if Jupe hadnt guessed!

Mr Hitchcock studied the boys report, flipping pages. Aha! he exclaimed.

Jupiter knew Marechal was guilty when he realized that

Tell them meant tell

M.

!

No! said Jupiter, laughing. That came later. While we were in the garage, Skinny said something that let me know Marechal was the one.

Skinny said ... he said ... The director glared at the report, then glared at the boys. Well, confound it, what did

Skinny say that told you De Groot was

innocent, and Marechal was the crook?

Jupiter grinned. Skinny said that his abductor had laughingly observed that everyone fell into the gorge once, before he knew it was there.

Yes, yes! Go on! Tell me! said Mr Hitchcock impatiently.

De Groot fell into the gorge that night at the adobe, Jupiter said simply.

Mr Hitchcock groaned. Of course! De Groot wouldnt have fallen if he had known the gorge was there! That meant that De Groot couldnt have locked you in the adobe earlier, and he couldnt have been the mysterious intruder of the first

day, despite his limp. Once you realized that, then the intruder almost had to be Mr Marechal! Thunderation, but youve done it!

Alfred Hitchcock Misses a Clue

All along, I thought something seemed wrong that night at the adobe,

added Jupe smugly.

The great director groaned again.
Monstrous! But I have failed, I missed a clue, and I must introduce this case!

Thank you, sir! Bob exclaimed.

We really appreciate it, sir, Pete enthused.

And, as a consolation, Mr Hitchcock, Jupiter said with a smile, producing a painting from the floor, we have asked Mr James to let you have one of the paintings of the shrinking house.

Sometimes, Mr Hitchcock said as he took the painting, you young schemers are as devious as your villains! Be off!

The boys hastily left the office. Behind them, Mr Hitchcock looked at the painting by old Joshua Cameron, the master forger of art, and laughed.

